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QUIET SKIES ON SALWEEN

To
My dear
FATHER and MOTHER

QUIET SKIES ON SALWEEN

by

ELLEN THORP



Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows;
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?

That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

A Shropshire Lad

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CHAPTER I

DANCE OF DEATH

My earliest recollection of Burma was perhaps prophetic. I remember sitting up on our nursery window-sill watching corpses, on open biers, being carried down the road. I heard the shrieks and wails of the mourners as they followed these victims of plague to the burning ground.

I recalled that childish memory during the Burmese campaign of 1942, and so I see the war there as a dance of cadavers down roads which lead through burning fields and blood-red villages. . . .

Far down in the south of Burma the opening notes were heard, and the first performers set to partners. Then the tempo quickened and the lengthening line of dancers swung northwards, across the Salween and the Sittang rivers, over the paddy fields to Rangoon. East and west the snaky line twisted across the map of Burma, writhing now here, now there, every mile sweeping more victims into this most macabre of all dances. Northwards again towards the Shan states and the China border. The hideous music woke the echoes over Salween, and was heard through the jungles; the clamour broke upon the hills round Taunggyi; northwards towards Lashio and westwards to India, until the whole of Burma had been swept by that dance of death.

So it was that Taunggyi came 'into the news'. I had followed the Japanesc advance step by step; it had held for me something of the inevitability of nightmare, and now, when I heard that there was fighting in Taunggyi, I shared, in some degree, the feelings of all those who have watched their homes invaded.

For Taunggyi was my home. I had passed the first sixteen years of my life there. I knew each clump of bamboos, every turn of the road; I had picked harebells and wild raspberries on the hills around the town. And now those hills were loud with war and dreadful with death. The battle swayed to and fro. The Japanese

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captured the town, then, on the following day, the Chinese stormed the heights, charged into the streets, and, in hand to hand fighting, drove out the enemy. A few days later the Japanese brought up reinforcements and there was fierce fighting in the hills around Taunggyi. Oh Hills of Youth, high hills!

And the pale ghost of memory, hovering over Taunggyi, looks down upon the jetsam of war where once peace had been. Tanks instead of bullock-carts! Machine guns in that bend of the road where once white violets grew among maidenhair fern. The kites and vultures have fed full upon the slain, and as they wheel overhead, hopeful of further banquets, they are sometimes daunted by the roar of low-flying aeroplanes. Can peace ever return to that road again, wonders the mournful ghost, and stillness to the skies of Taunggyi?

I have set down these memories of the Shan states because I was happy there, as a record of an era which has passed, never to return, and because there was a beauty and a serenity which enrich the heart. To remember Taunggyi is to return home and to greet familiar faces; to recall the cheerfulness of poor people; the patience of craftsmen and the shapeliness, under their hands, of wood and silver and ivory; prayer, lifted in a myriad soaring temples, in every bell-haunted breeze. The incomparable beauty of flower and forest and wild, free animals; the high hills; the 'old and still enduring sky'; these flow into my mind when I think of the Shan states, for they were all about us and formed the daily background of our life there. And so

I would fill my heart with thoughts that will not rend,
O heart, I do not dare go empty-hearted . . .

I would think of a thousand things,
Lovely and durable, and taste them slowly,
One after one, like tasting a sweet food.
I have need to busy my heart with Quietude.

I will return to Taunggyi and to Quietude.

CHAPTER II

SHAN CHILDHOOD

I

THE windows of our house looked out upon a road in Burma. Not *the* Burma Road. Ours was a road of peace. A long road. It begins in Rangoon, beside the muddy waters of the Irrawaddy; and curves past the Shwe Dagon pagoda, and then goes due north, through the hot plains of Lower Burma and the unending paddy fields until it comes to the hills. Then it turns north-east, and climbing the foothills and the mountains it goes onward until it leaps the Salween and comes at last to the uplands where the frontiers of Burma and China, Siam and Indo-China run together.

Tranquillity was in the skies and upon the land; it was a road of peace, and slow, contented travel.

That road is woven into the texture of my life. I was three months old when I first came up it. A traveller on that road in October 1906 might have stopped to watch us pass. Eight bullock-carts are creaking slowly along. Seven of these are loaded with a houseful of furniture, cases and equipment. In the leading cart are a Madrassi ayah and three small children all with whooping cough. Leonard aged 3, Mary, 14 months and myself 3 months had whooped the whole way up from Rangoon. Daddy and mother walk on ahead, and occasionally sit down by the wayside and wait for the crawling carts to come up to them, inspect their offspring and walk on again.

We had left Rangoon 12 days before; a day and a night in the train and ten days in the carts have brought us within a few miles of our destination. A mile an hour uphill, two miles an hour on the level; that is the bullock-cart's speed. But every turn of the wheels had taken us a little higher out of the plains of Lower Burma, into the hills where the wind blows over pine forests.

A couple of mules pass us, trotting quickly. They are laden

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with mail bags. His Majesty's mails travel express with relays at every post. The letters that have just overtaken us were posted in Rangoon only five days ago.

The wheels creak on, and the slow miles drop behind. We turn off the road, and in a few minutes crawl up a gravelled drive and stop in front of a bungalow. We have reached Taunggyi; we are at home.

Taunggyi, four hundred miles north of Rangoon, and 200 miles west of the Chinese frontier. She is a little town perched five thousand feet above the Bay of Bengal, on the edge of a shelf from which she peeps down at the hills falling away below her, fold upon fold, into the Yaungwhe plain. Behind her the Crag rises, a long shoulder of wooded mountain, from whose summit a view of thirty miles is unfolded like a map. Before the eye of my memory that superb prospect stretches as clear now as it did when I climbed the Crag many years ago. Beyond the roofs and trees of Taunggyi low hills ripple outwards; some are covered with a patchwork of farmed and fallow land, some are crowned with a cluster of pines, on one more distant hill a pagoda's gilded spire gleams in the sun. Cloud shadows move across the hills. In the valley below, the waters of the Inle Lake and White Crow Lake are alternately dull and bright as the shadows pass over them.

Here my sisters and I passed our childhood, and Taunggyi far among the Shan hills will always be Home, as England, which knew not the child, can never be. Our house, long and low, fronted by a veranda, lay enflowered, graced with lawns, girdled with trees. Pine trees, and oaks, cherry tree, crab-apple and bamboo threw their shadows, entwined, across the lawns, for my father refused to cut down any tree unless it were clearly in danger of falling. Even the 'stink-tree', whose real name we never discovered, and which, from March till May, smelt like a sewer, was safe from the axe. The air was loud with the pleasant noise of birds, sparrows and minas, jays, crows, 'magpie-robins' and 'squawkers' who chattered and roosted in the trees, unmolested and unafraid.

SHAN CHILDHOOD

Each room of the house constituted a little world of its own. Our bedroom with uncarpeted floor was bare of all furniture save a couple of chairs, a chest of drawers and three beds, flanked at each corner by inebriated-looking iron poles, once white but from which the paint had long since flaked away, leaving instead rusty patches. These were the mosquito net poles and for nine months of the year the beds were canopied with mosquito nets. They were lowered every evening before the first shadows brought the mosquitoes out of their hiding places, and were put up every morning by the ayah, when she came to rouse and dress us. During the cold weather, from November to February there were few mosquitoes, so the nets were packed away with mothballs to be unpacked when warmer nights brought the hum of tiny wings, and the accompanying itch of bitten wrists and ankles. In my secret heart of hearts I always welcomed the return of mosquito nets. They made of one's bed such a secure white universe, into which no flying or creeping thing could penetrate, and affording, as I thought, considerable protection against robbers, murderers, snakes, ghosts and above all the leopard which might leap in through the window. The latter was not an impossibility; leopards did sometimes wander down from the jungle into our garden, in hopeful quest of dog, goat, cow or horse. And our bedroom windows were low enough for our dogs to leap through, which they did with a scratch, a scrabble and a thump, waking me up with a jerk and sending me cowering under the sheets, wondering when I should hear the leopard snuffing round the mosquito net. I can still see through the bedroom window, against the starlit sky, the silhouette of one tall eucalyptus tree, slender and silver, and hear the whisper of the night breeze through its leaves.

The doors of the bedroom, as of all the rooms, stood wide most of the day, and our pets wandered in and out at their pleasure. The cats slept on the beds, and the dogs snored beneath them. When the nets were down the cats used to come and scratch at them and mew to be admitted, and when we let them in they curled themselves upon our blankets, gradually pushing themselves

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further into the centre of the bed, until we were sleeping coiled round the cat.

Adjoining our bedroom was the dining-room, and, on nights when our parents had guests to dinner, no power on earth could have kept us in bed. We pushed the door ajar and peeped longingly at the dinner table, bright with silver, rosy golden in candle-light and with smilax trailing over the white cloth. Fascinated, we listened to the chatter and laughter, only half-understanding much of the gossip, but storing it away in our memories for future reference. Longingly we squinted at the dishes of preserved fruits and chocolates, and in disgust contrasted the tempting dishes with our supper of soup and milk pudding. Sometimes in our excitement we pushed the door a little too wide open, and then Loogale, the table servant, noticed it, and shutting it with an air of extreme disapproval planted himself in front of it to obscure our view. When at last dinner was over and the room was empty of guests and servants, we crept out of the bedroom and scuttled round the table draining the dregs from the wine glasses and snatching as much dessert as we could before the servants returned to clear away the dishes. I remember one dinner party when we could not restrain our longing until dinner was over. There were some dishes of chocolate on the sideboard; we knew the senior table boy could not be cajoled or corrupted, but we had hopes of the junior boy who was new to the job and had taken up his position close beside the door. Softly we pushed sticks through the chink, and prodding him in the ribs, whispered to him to impale some chocolates on the end of the sticks. Looking very scared he did as he was told, and we were just about to withdraw our sticks in triumph, when Loogale spotted what was going on, pulled the chocolates off the sticks and bundled his unhappy assistant to the other side of the room.

We seldom had other children to play with, and so we developed a self-sufficiency and independence of companionship which outlasted our childhood. There were no theatres, pantomimes, cinemas and toy-shops, no parks where we could meet other children and sail boats and feed the ducks. We invented our own

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games, those games which children have invented and played the whole world over, shopping and housekeeping and 'Fathers and Mothers'. When it was fine we played in the garden, in the shade of the trees. We lighted a fire, borrowed a frying pan from the long-suffering cook, and fried ourselves sodden and greasy chipped potatoes which we ate with the greatest satisfaction. We climbed trees, and pursued leaf boats down the stream which ran through the garden, bounced up and down on the springy branches of a fallen eucalyptus tree, and explored the uncanny shadows of the spinney behind the house, unconsciously yet continually on the watch for snakes. On wet days we played on the veranda, or in the nursery, and my earliest memories centre round this room, on whose distempered walls hung 'The Light of the World', 'The Sistine Madonna', 'When did you last see your Father?' and Marcus Stone's simpering curly-haired children with their fluffy pets. Our toys were simple and unmechanical, a rocking horse, a stuffed elephant, a doll's house, skipping ropes, battledore and shuttlecock, dolls, scrapbooks. Our chief delights were reading, drawing and painting. I never remember a time when I could not read, and when we did not have innumerable paint boxes, crayons and sketch-books. When paper ran out we used the nursery wall, and it was covered with pencilled scrawls as high up as our hands could reach. There was one corner of the nursery which was punishment corner, and in which, when naughty, we were sent to stand face to the wall. It did not worry us much, as we always kept a pencil hanging behind a picture there, and shielded by a cupboard from the direct gaze of authority we would wile away the term of punishment by drawing over the wall or on the backs of the pictures.

Our little world of the veranda. One end had been fitted up as an office for my father's use. Then came a large table whereon stood mother's sewing-machine and which was always piled high with household mending, and clothes in various stages of repair or manufacture. A little further along, a drop table was fastened to the veranda railings where my father oiled his guns, and did odd jobs. And then at the other end of the veranda were a cane

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sofa and chairs, used chiefly by us children to make houses, tents and wigwams for our games. Outside the veranda railings stood pots of ferns and geraniums over whose foliage butterflies hovered. Green 'chicks' or cane blinds hung along the fascia boards of the veranda roof and were let down during the day, to keep out the glare, and when I read Marvell's lines:

Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade

I think of our veranda in Taunggyi, with the sunlight filtering through the swaying chicks, bathing us and our small world in a dim green light.

That green glow fell upon the shoulders of the 'boxwallahs' as they spread their wares upon the veranda floor. The arrival of a boxwallah or pedlar, was an event of major importance to us. Like the pedlar of our great-grandfather's England, the Indian boxwallahs were the shop windows and bargain counters of remote villages. In baskets balanced on their heads they brought laces, cards of hooks and eyes and buttons, and draped lengths of silk and muslin over the veranda chairs to tempt our dazzled eyes. My sisters and I were pigtailed and the boxwallahs brought ribbons for our pigtails and sashes; if they failed to make their usual visit, mother had either to make us ribbons out of lengths of silk material, or send to Rangoon or Calcutta for them.

The ghosts of many footsteps lie upon that veranda, thick as leaves in Vallambrosa. Steps of the Indian postmen bringing English mail, telegrams, and official correspondence; steps of 'peons' or messengers, bearing the daily war bulletin to be read, initialled and sent on to the next house; steps of beggars and jugglers; of schoolboys requesting permission for town leave; of Shan chieftains with their wives and retainers; of friends. I was on the veranda when news came to mother of her brother's death on Hill 70, and in that moment I learnt with panic that even grown-ups, so secure and unassailable, can cry. We were doing our lessons on the veranda, on the morning of November 12th, when we heard from the military police lines along the road, the

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sound of cheering that told us of the Armistice. On wet days, when the monsoon drummed on the corrugated iron roof and fell in shining spears, the boards of the veranda floor creaked and shivered as my father and Suba Singh fenced with each other. Suba Singh, a retired Sikh soldier and the school drill instructor, was not unlike W. G. Grace in appearance, and his bushy black beard bristled out from beneath his fencing visor. He was a good soldier and swordsman, and an excellent drill instructor, even in his cups. His work never suffered on these occasions, though perhaps his pupils did, and certainly his wife did, for he used to beat her then. He taught me to ride the bicycle and I was a long time learning, because he was so scared of the Miss Sahib falling off and hurting herself that he never let go of his grip on the saddle . . . Dogs and cats; the scent of geranium leaves and gun oil and mackintoshes; topees hanging on antlers; our pet rabbit hopping along the floor and stopping to thump his hind legs; a snake, which had slid out from among the ferns and geraniums, lying under the table, fearful and suspicious with cold eyes and flickering tongue . . . The world of the veranda.

If ever a room revealed a personality the drawing-room was the expression of my father's. From the modern point of view it was overcrowded but my father believes that empty rooms bewray the empty mind. A sunlit, flower-filled room, and yet holding something of the wistful, thought-provoking atmosphere which clings to bookstalls, antique shops and old houses. The walls were hung with pictures and portraits which once adorned an English vicarage, and alongside them hung the fierce weapons of India and Burma collected by my father during thirty years in the East. They looked down upon a strange assortment of objects. From the mantelpiece the wide mouth of a Benares brass frog gaped up at them; we called it Agnes after my younger sister whose mouth is no rosebud; when we arrived at years of discretion we used Agnes as an ashtray and her mouth emitted gentle whorls of smoke from unextinguished cigarettes. Beside Agnes lies a lapis ring once worn by a Persian archer to protect his thumb from the bow string. The lovely attitude of an Indian 'lota' or bowl, is menaced

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by the cruel points of the baghnak or 'tiger's claw', a weapon so called from its similarity to a tiger's claw. Hunting dagger and processional spear, Burmese knife, and Malayan kris, Rajput shield and Persian blade. Cruel and barbarous and murderous; yes, but artists made them, with joy in their making, and warriors loved them, so they live in enduring beauty, and the bitterness of all the tears and bloodshed they have seen is forgotten in their perfection of form and adornment.

On Sunday afternoons we had Sunday school in the drawing-room. We were made to learn by heart the Church of England catechism, then, after reading the Epistle and Gospel for the day and repeating the Collect which we had to learn during the week, mother read to us from various books considered suitable for Sunday fare. There were two horrible little books entitled *Peep of Day* and *Line upon Line*, of which my clearest memory is the illustration of Adam and Eve, very modestly dressed, confronted by a plump angel and flanked by a serpent of benign countenance. *The Young Christian's Progress*, a High Church and delightful version of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* both of which we loved; Neale's *Lives of the Saints*, and, best of all, two big volumes, the Old and New Testaments illustrated by James Tissot. He went to the Holy Land and after studying its peoples and costumes, illustrated the Testaments, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. His Old Testament pictures convey better than any others I know the barbarism and ferocious zeal of the Chosen People; of his New Testament illustrations I can find no higher praise than to say that some of the terror and beauty and strength of the Gospels are in them; for me the scenes of the life of Christ will be for ever associated with Tissot's interpretation. Those pictures imprinted themselves upon my childish mind and became a part of me. Whenever I hear of someone's death I immediately see the departed soul as Tissot saw the soul of the Penitent Thief journeying towards Paradise — a tiny, naked figure borne through starry spaces by winged forms, immense, aloof and calm.

The drawing-room was lighted by a single oil lamp which hung from the centre of the ceiling. I remember it of an evening when

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the walls took on a golden glow, and the lamplight winked from a thousand burnished points on dagger, picture and vase. The breeze that blows through the windows, opened wide, in the hot weather to the darkness, sets the lamp swaying, and the circle of shadow thrown down by the lamp sways over the carpet. A bat flutters round the room, bumping softly against walls and ceiling; sometimes a moth blunders down the chimney of the lamp, and the flame smokes and flares over his funeral pyre, and then we all have to sit in semi-darkness while the servant carries away the lamp to clean and relight it. The dogs whimper and scratch themselves on the floor; on either arm of daddy's chair a cat blinks and purrs, and the soft sound mingles with the subdued murmur of their master's voice, as he reads aloud to himself from Xenophon, Virgil, Caesar, or the Greek Testament. The rest of us sit in silence. We have always been an unsociable family in our pleasures; we were not brought up to play round-games or cards and were suppressed if we chattered, whispered or giggled; instead we were encouraged to read or draw. Evening after evening we sat in the lamp-lit room and the centuries closed around us. My father's voice droned out the majestic rhythms of Rome and Athens, and the weapons of India, China and Persia answered him silently from the walls.

Our house, so friendly, so safe, a fortress. I could lie at night and listen unafraid to the thunder of the rain on the corrugated iron roof and watch the lightning leap across the white walls of the mosquito net. But that treasured certainty of security was shattered one day, since when walls have always held a menace for me.

One morning my sisters and I had gone with our governess for our usual walk before lessons began. We were playing in the shade of the oak trees which grew beside the little lake in the school grounds. I remember that Mary and I were having a competition to see how long we could balance on one leg on the trunk of a fallen oak. I had just counted up to 78 when the trunk beneath me shuddered and I was thrown off it.

When I picked myself up my dazed eyes saw the Crag lean

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slowly forward, shrug its wooded shoulders and then sink back.

Snatching up my baby sister my governess called to us to run as hard as we could out into the open meadow. More bewildered than scared, we followed her, then stood watching the trees bend and sway in a crazy dance, while boulders crashed down the Crag's precipitous face, and beneath our feet the ground rippled and moaned and rumbled.

When the earthquake was over another oak had crashed beside its prostrate brother, from whose trunk I had been so summarily projected. Beneath one of its branches I saw a small snake whose crushed coils were still jerking.

We hurried back to the house wondering fearfully what would have happened to mother whom we had left ill in bed; to our great relief we saw her wrapped in a dressing-gown, sitting in a chair on the lawn, surrounded with crab-apples which the earthquake had loosened from the tree and sent rolling in every direction. When the first tremors had set the bed rocking and brought the plaster showering down from the walls she had managed to totter out of bed and with the help of the servants had reached the lawn. Inside the house vases had been overturned, pictures and ornaments had crashed from the walls, the floor was deep in plaster, and our animals were crouching in abject terror under beds and sofa. Later we discovered that we had been lucky having nothing worse than cracked walls and a wrecked chimney, but some houses in Taunggyi had been seriously damaged. As far as I know, no one was killed; if the earthquake had happened during the night there must have been many casualties. In our eyes the hero of the earthquake was a young police officer who had come back from an early morning round of inspection and was having his bath, when a wave of soapy water surged out of the bath on the heaving floor. As he shot out into the garden, the bathroom roof fell in. We were never tired of hearing him tell us how he ran out into the garden in a towel.

For a couple of years after that, Taunggyi was visited by a series of earthquakes. The first shock was the severest, and none

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of the succeeding ones did any damage beyond loosening a little plaster. Sometimes we had two or three tremors in a day, at other times weeks would pass without a shock. But for months afterwards we slept with doors unlocked, and a basket of warm clothes lying beside the door. Many a night we were jerked out of sleep by the familiar rumble and tremor, and sat up prepared to scramble out from under the mosquito net and hurry out of doors. My two sisters were not affected by them, but ever since that first shock I have had a horror of earthquakes. A kind of nausea would grip me as I heard in the distance that unmistakeable underground rumble of an approaching quake, as I felt the ground ripple beneath me, and waited to see whether the ripple would turn to a swaying or whether it would die away. By day these tremors were bad enough, leaving me always with shaking knees and hollow stomach, but in the darkness they brought nightmare terrors which sometimes recur even now, if a distant lorry or train sets my bed shaking.

On the Sunday following the earthquake there was another slight tremor during Evening Service, causing us all to glance apprehensively at the walls where cracks already bore witness to the severity of the first shock. When the service was over, the earthquake was the main topic of conversation, and we heard then that some districts had suffered more than Taunggyi. At Lawksawk, forty miles away, the ground had split open, and a stream of red sand had been vomited out, completely covering a rice field. The natives were highly excited and apprehensive regarding it as an omen of approaching disaster.

II

My father loves animals 'this side idolatry', and our house and garden were always overflowing with an assortment of pets. We had not only the more orthodox domestic pets, cats, dogs and horses, but other animals who shared our board, and not infrequently our beds, were leopards, a bear, rabbits and a pangolin.

A succession of those exquisite companions, cats, pass through

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my memory. Bla, a contraction of 'Billee', the Hindustani for 'cat', most handsome of animals, whose father was a wild cat, inherited a fair proportion of savagery, indicated by his lashing tail and low growling when annoyed. A fierce, proud, independent creature, he never once bit or scratched any of us, but was, on the contrary, more demonstrative than many a tame cat. He used to jump up on our laps, or on to our pillows, and rub his head against our faces, purring extravagantly and uttering little mews and whimpers of love. Sometimes his wild ancestry proved irresistible and he would disappear for days at a time, presumably on long rambles through the jungle, but he invariably returned clean, silky, self-possessed, and more affectionate than ever.

My sister Mary discovered Goggles at the bottom of the garden, nursing a litter of kittens, and on the verge of starvation; at the base of her tail was a gaping sore crawling with maggots. At first she was pitifully frightened, and mistrustful, but gradually gained confidence, and when she had grown accustomed to us, mother and Mary doctored her terrible sore. She screamed dreadfully when they washed and dressed it, but never lost her trust in them, and in time the sore place healed so cleanly that the fur covered it, leaving no scar at all. By that time she was an accepted member of the household, and remained so until we left Burma. Always gentle and shrinking, she was the incarnation of devoted motherhood, wearing herself out over each successive litter. Many a morning have I woken up to hear movements beneath the bed, and peeped under to see Goggles complacently looking on, while her kittens played with a snake which she had brought in for them. Sometimes it was dead, but frequently she merely paralysed it, presumably by breaking its backbone, and then purring gently, watched the kittens dancing round the helpless snake, only able to hiss and flicker its tongue impotently. Neither Goggles nor the kittens were ever bitten, or if they were, they never showed any ill effects. Whether Goggles 'picked' non-venomous varieties, or whether, before bringing them into the house, she fenced with them until they had exhausted their venom, I cannot say.

Our dogs were known in the station as the 'bobbery pack' and

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they were a crowd of ragamuffins. We seemed incapable of attracting even a moderately aristocratic looking dog; they were all 'pies', that is mongrels from the lowest haunts of the bazaar, but, if coronets and Norman blood were lacking, they were affectionate and possessed much character and humour.

Mac was the nearest approach to a well-bred dog; he had a good proportion of Aberdeen in him and was a fighter. We did not keep him long, for after he had mauled and half-killed every other dog in Taunggyi we felt that friendly relations with our neighbours were being imperilled. So reluctantly we sent Mac to Loilem, a 'one-man' station, sixty miles away, where the District Commissioner and his wife were anxious for a good watch dog. They reported that Mac settled down there and seemed to have forgotten us completely. A few years later, however, we went on tour through Loilem and half an hour after we had entered the rest house, there was an irruption of Aberdeen grey, and Mac hurled himself on us, licking our faces and slobbering with joyful astonishment.

Phil was a comedian and the ugliest dog we ever had, which is saying a good deal. His body was long and black and like india-rubber, his spindly legs splayed out into enormous paws, his tail looked as if it had been broken in three places and badly set again, he had huge bats' ears, and a perpetual silly grin on his face. He was a clumsy lout, always butting into things, and tripping over his own plate of food, but he was so good natured that even Goggles learnt not to be afraid of him. He was full of greed and low cunning. Not far from our house was a poongyi-kyaung or monastery where there were always scraps of food in plenty for beggars, children and animals. Every morning Phil used to disappear into the poongyi-kyaung, and at about noon would emerge. From our veranda we could see him coming along the road, blithe and jaunty, angular tail cocky, and bats' ears erect. But just before reaching our garden gate, down went his ears and tail, one paw curled itself up, and a limping miserable hound dragged himself up the drive to flop at our feet and with pitiful gaze beg for just a scrap of food for a starving dog.

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Phil thrust his ugly nose in where angels trod with diffidence. After the war a Durbar was held in Taunggyi. The Lieutenant-Governor of Burma left his gubernatorial state in Rangoon and, like a father, came up to Taunggyi to attend to our woes and problems. From all over the Shan states the Sawbwas, their wives and retinues flowed into Taunggyi, the wives of government officials spent their days in dress-making and their husbands toiled to arrange accommodation for the inrush of visitors, and mopped their brows in an endeavour to decide the knotty questions of precedence.

The great day came. The Durbar Hall behind the Club was crammed to bursting point. On the platform the officials stood waiting, and the wives sat in happy anticipation of shaking hands with the 'L.G.' A red carpet ran the whole length of the Hall, lined on either side by police officials holding back the crowd and, even more important, keeping the sacrosanct carpet unsullied by profane footsteps. Outside, a roar and the strains of 'The King' announced the arrival of the Lieutenant-Governor and his suite. Up the steps of the Durbar Hall they came, magnificent in white uniforms, decorations, swords and plumed helmets. A reverent silence fell on all. Then up the virgin carpet walked Phil. Eluding the anguished clutches of the police he solemnly preceded the L.G.'s procession up the Hall. At the foot of the dais he halted, then — horror of horrors! — committed an unmentionable indiscretion; pushed past the Governor's legs, trotted up the platform steps, snuffed along the row of skirts until he found us, then settled down to sleep. We tried to look as though Phil did not belong to us, but confronted with his flagrantly possessive air, our effort lacked conviction.

Bhalu was a black bear. A forest ranger brought him to daddy, a little forlorn bundle of black wool, whose mother had been shot. Fortunately he was old enough to be reared on milk and mashes. He grew up to be a jolly, friendly bearlet, and enjoyed a game of hide and seek as much as we did, and lolloped around after us wherever we went. He lived under a crab-apple tree and loved the small sour apples which fell around him. He used to gather a

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pile of these apples, then plump himself down on his little tail, and with feet well splayed out and the heap of apples between them would sit there and devour them, throwing cores, stalks and leaves about him in a manner which would have made an anti-litter official weep. He adored being bathed and had his own beloved zinc bath, and after he had been washed, he used to empty the bath, then get into it and sit, meditatively regarding the passers-by, and grumbling happily to himself. If it rained he would heave himself out of the bath, drag it up against the trunk of the tree, turn it bottom upwards, and then crouch on it with his face to the trunk and fore-paws over his ears to shelter them from the pattering raindrops, looking like a naughty child who has been put in the corner.

As Bhalu grew older he became more boisterous, though no less affectionate, and we children were warned not to allow him to play games with us for fear that he should try to hug us, with possibly disastrous results. Poor Bhalu could not understand this ostracism, and would pursue us all over the garden, we shrieking with half apprehensive laughter, and he grumbling and 'chuntering'. If we ran round the house to avoid him, he would rush up the veranda steps, and, like a thunderbolt, hurl himself right through the dining-room, down the passage and out at the back to meet us; many were the plates which were dropped by a startled houseboy laying the table. He had a passion for fruit. I had planted a pineapple in my garden, and tended it and watched the fruit gradually swell and ripen. One day, mother looked at it, and said, 'To-morrow that will be ready for cutting'. Bhalu also had been keeping his eye on the pineapple, and that afternoon, from the bedroom window I saw him come rocking down the path, grumbling and snorting. One sniff at the plant, and it was torn up by the roots, and the pineapple tucked under his armpit he lolloped off to eat his titbit.

Poor Bhalu had become a full grown bear when he developed a sore on his head, and like his proverbial prototype, became fractious and then dangerously bad tempered. There was no choice; he had to be shot. Daddy could not bring himself to do the bloody

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deed, and so a Gurkha soldier was summoned from the barracks. We wept and wept as we saw him go across the garden; a rifle cracked, Bhalu was buried where he fell and we had lost a dear companion.

One day, an Indian juggler appeared, and, squatting down at the foot of the veranda, proceeded to do his tricks. We watched, enraptured, while he stabbed his assistant, swallowed knives, produced yards of string from his mouth, and discovered all kinds of things in baskets which we knew were empty. A pair of pigeons first appeared, and then Pip, and from that moment Pip's fortunes and ours were linked. He was a white rabbit with pink eyes, and when the show was over, daddy bought him from the juggler for eight rupees and an old coat, and gave him to us.

Whether it was the result of his unconventional training I cannot say, but Pip was a rabbit of superlative intelligence. A hutch was made for him into which he hopped at night and settled down to sleep without any fuss. We kept the door fastened, not to keep Pip in, but to keep snakes out, and in the morning when we unfastened it out came Pip, and sitting up on his little scut, patted our chins with his paws, ears twitching and nose quivering with rapture. All day he roamed about the house and garden, trustful and unafraid, jumping up on to our laps or on to the sofa to sleep. When tea-time came, there was Pip, beside our chairs, begging, on hind legs, for scraps of cake, and, above all, for strawberries which he loved passing lettuce.

Pip had a long and happy life with us, but one sad morning when we went to his cage we found him stretched stiff and cold. He was buried in the Pets' Cemetery at the bottom of the garden, and a special cross placed at his head. For weeks we were inconsolable, and I have yet to find Pip's peer among bunnies.

So many pets and I remember them all with heartache. Our horses; Neddy, who threw us all in turn, Robin, Scallywag, and little Thong-ze-Na-Jat, which is the Burmese for forty-five rupees, best of children's ponies. The monkeys who liked all the family except me, but who screamed with fury at the sight of me, flying at my face, scratching it and pulling my hair. The leopards,

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pretty and dainty as kittens while young, but who early on indicated a tendency to be red in tooth and claw; when they were old enough to fend for themselves we set them free in the jungle behind the Crag, to the great indignation of some members of the station who considered that we ought to have shot 'such dangerous brutes'. The pangolin, that queer scaly creature whose enormous ever-flickering tongue decimated the fly population; I cannot pretend he was a great success as a pet; we never penetrated beneath his scaly armour and discovered whether he had loving and lovable instincts. He pined, so we let him loose in the jungle, and the two rupees for which we had brought him from a villager will, I trust, 'acquire merit' for us in the life to come.

III

Memory works strangely. I was very small when we experimented with monkeys for pets, but I recall them clearly, I suppose because they disliked me so much. And I have to confess that I grew up with a more vivid remembrance of these unpleasant creatures than of my brother Leonard. I was five when he went to England and school, and sixteen before I saw him again, and in those intervening years I had only one memory of him, namely, of him dropping the rocking-horse on my toes, of me howling, and of him being smacked.

I remember every tree in our garden, every road in Taunggyi, every feature of our servants, and, if I could ever forget, two things would at once summon up remembrance of times past, cockcrow at dawn, and the smell of a wood fire. A little girl often woke early, and lay and listened to the world outside bestirring itself; and before the ayah had come in to put up the mosquito net I had heard the geese honking as they went down, in slow procession, to the lake; and the stable boy chopping wood for heating the bath water in kerosene tins behind the kitchen; and cocks crowing, here in our compound, and from the washerman's huts, and, very thin and distant, from the barracks beyond the

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school grounds . . . The crackle and smell of a log newly thrown onto the fire, and I am once again Nellie Baba and, with Mary Baba and Agnes Baba, I am sitting on the drawing-room floor in front of the fire on a December or January night. The pine branches sputter and smell heavenly; I know that, in a minute, I shall hear mother's voice, 'Come and say your prayers now, dears'. Then the ayah will appear in the doorway, and we will have to kiss everyone good night, and leave the delicious warmth; and oh, how cold the bedroom is, as we scramble out of our clothes by candlelight, and snuggle down gratefully under the blankets.

The cold weather, that perfect marriage of sunny days and frosty nights. They live in my mind like those dear memories of Rupert Brooke . . . 'These have I loved' . . . To wake on a morning and see the sun glinting on the frosted lawns, gleaming on the scarlet poinsettia and the shiny foliage of eucalyptus tree. In the dining-room a wood fire sent rosy shapes dancing across white tablecloth and distempered walls, and on the hearth the eyes of our cats gleamed more golden than before. Hot buttered toast scented the room. The warm sun and the keen air, the blue and golden hours slanting down to a frosty sunset behind misty pines and springing bamboo. The sudden cold darkness and the sudden laughter of firelight and lamplight through uncurtained door and window.

Remembering the almost unbearable bliss which Christmas Day always brought, I pity all who cannot look back upon like happiness. Living, as we did, where toy shops were unknown, we got a keener thrill out of new toys than more sophisticated children did. We hung our stockings from the mosquito net poles, empty of mosquito nets now that the rains were over, and I remember thinking what a good thing it was that Christmas did not fall in the rainy season, as Father Christmas might have got his sack mixed up in the mosquito nets. And after the stockings had been opened there was the excitement of the breakfast table, piled high with envelopes from England, Christmas cards from grannie, aunts and uncles. Snow and robins, holly and skating,

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church towers with flying bells, all so strange and unfamiliar, part of a world more unbelievable, more difficult to imagine than the world of fairyland. I used to try and visualize snow and, influenced, I suppose, by pictures of snowballing, I always imagined snowflakes as being the size of tennis balls, and of a cotton-woolly consistency. This conception persisted until I came to England in my sixteenth year, but was shattered four days after we landed, when in an ecstasy of excitement at the sight of snowflakes, tempered by disappointment at their insignificant size, I rushed out, and my feet shot forwards and I landed on my back in a most uncotton-woolly substance. This, though my first actual contact with snow, was not the first time I saw it. A fortnight before, on board the *Otranto* coming through the straits of Messina, I had seen, as in a vision, through the crystalline air, olive groves marching up the hill-slopes towards summits where the sunlight gleamed on white patches — white as the Christmas cards on our breakfast table, with the firelight leaping across them.

After breakfast we decorated the house. Lacking holly we picked pine branches, cherry blossom and sprays of poinsettia. The latter was then in full colour and its scarlet leaves challenged every other flower's brilliance. The milky juice, slightly sticky, would spill on pinafores, and drip down the pictures as we tied up the sprays, but that was all part of the fun to us. The leaves drooped after a day, but what did that matter when there were hedges of it squandering their colour on the clear December air?

There were no church services; instead we looked at Tissot's illustrations of the Birth at Bethlehem and sang Christmas carols:

Bells chiming, bells ringing
Over the wold,
Lights burning, feet turning
Out of the cold,
Song swelling, peace-telling
Message of old.

Then it was evening and we went across to the school buildings, where in the largest schoolroom was the Christmas tree. A huge

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pine branch grew in a tub, and coming out of the darkness, we were blinded by the glow of candles sparkling among the branches. In the shadows behind the halo of radiance were the dark faces of the house and school servants and their children, rapt, half scared, wondering. Every child on the compound had a toy and a bag of sweets, every servant a blanket and a few rupees. Year after year, mother's red dressing-gown, transformed by borders of cotton-wool, disguised the Resident, the forest officer or whatever kindly Samaritan had consented to act as Father Christmas. Then, our arms full of presents, and stumbling with sleep, we returned to the house to pull crackers and snatch raisins and four-anna pieces out of the snap-dragon, and another Christmas Day was over.

January's cherry-blossom made a carpet for February. With March the frosty nights and keen sunny days gave place to the hot season, which lasted till the breaking of the monsoon in mid-May. But even in the hot season Taunggyi was never unbearably sultry, for the sun's strength was tempered by cool mountain breezes. There were compensations for the loss of frost, and the falling of the cherry-blossom. The March sun ripened the strawberries to a size and sweetness unsurpassed in even a Kentishman's wildest dreams; plumbago opened its cerulean wings; cannas, verbena, tuberoses, heliotrope, geranium and love-in-the-mist were lavished upon us in quick succession. Pink crocuses took the winds of April with beauty. In May the dahlias leapt into bloom, red and orange, magenta, white and yellow. Their hollow stalks provided us with an endless supply of pipes for blowing soap bubbles, though they had the disadvantage of making our lips sore if we sucked at them too long. And as if we were not already surfeited with splendour, in June the cigar-shaped buds of the Taunggyi lilies unfolded in the consummation of all beauty. As tall as a man, with trumpets ten inches long, their white and golden heads drooped with the weight of their own sweetness. They are so heavily scented that we could not have them in vases inside the house, but on warm June nights, as we sat indoors and the moths flopped against the oil lamps, the lilies invaded the

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rooms in wave upon wave of scent, an almost bodily presence which mocked our efforts at banishment.

Every day until the monsoon broke we had tea in the garden. Maung Hsan and Kantu went round the flower-beds with their watering-cans, made locally from kerosene tins, and the whisper of falling drops mingled with the sigh of the pine trees to form a cool symphony of sound. The dogs and cats sat expectantly beside our chairs, and Pip lolloped about and, jumping on our laps, with twitching nose demanded strawberries. As the hot season advanced, the crickets began to tune up, and from noon till sunset the air vibrated with their ceaseless shrilling. Sometimes their chorus became too deafening to be borne, and we were driven indoors from the tea-table under the trees. One afternoon, when the clamour was more earsplitting than usual, daddy fired a shotgun into the branches of a tree in which the main orchestra seemed to have settled. It was an unconventional way of dealing with the pest, but successful; when the echoes of the shot died away, not a cheep broke the silence, only our ears still buzzed and roared from the day's uninterrupted shrilling. For an hour we had peace, then cautiously one cricket emitted a diffident creak, another replied with equal timidity, then another more boldly, and in a few minutes the chorus had risen to full strength.

In May the monsoon broke. For weeks we had watched the clouds piling up on the south-west horizon, while the atmosphere grew, daily, more sultry and oppressive, and then the rains came, with lightning and reverberating thunder. Tea in the garden ceased; Maung Hsan and Kantu no longer watered the flower-beds. Every evening, if the rain were not too heavy, saw us sallying forth for the daily walk with squeaking boots, umbrellas and mackintoshes, which had been brought out from the recesses of cupboards and drawers in which they had lain unneeded for seven months. Snakes were numerous, having been washed out from their holes by the heavy torrents. In the bathrooms the 'chicken-coops' appeared; these were beehive-shaped bamboo frames, beneath which a charcoal brazier was kept continually

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burning; over the coops were hung bedding and clothes from which the damp rose in clouds of steam. The drip of raindrops from the roof and the trees was unceasing, and, instead of the shrilling of crickets, the roar of the stream at the bottom of the garden sounded in our ears. The rapidity with which that stream rose was astonishing. From a starved trickle a few inches wide it rose, in a couple of hours, to a torrent eight feet deep, red with mud, and sweeping in its spate leaves, branches and small animals. From May to November mist wreathed the hills, and every morning at sunrise the Crag appeared for a few moments —

... warm, and newly bathed,
Wringing the water from her arboreous hair,

and then was veiled once more in the clouds.

November saw the end of the rains, and ushered in the cold weather, and the whole world, after five months' rain, seemed to float serenely in a wash of clean and luminous air.

I V

Our story-books were legion. Many of them were legacies from the nursery days of Victorian aunts and uncles, and in spite of, or perhaps owing to, their rather 'goody-goody' tone, ever delightful to us. Mrs. Ewing's tales, *Jackanapes*, *A Flat Iron for a Farthing*, and *Mrs. Over-the-Way's Remembrances*; are these still in print, and as much beloved by the rather 'hard-boiled' modern child as by us? Mrs. Molesworth's books; *Little Women* and *Good Wives*; the 'Katy' books; these and many others littered our nursery. Less worthy of remembrance and yet clearly recalled is *Harold's Boyhood*, one of those books whose author was more concerned to inculcate morals than to provide entertainment. Harold was an exceedingly naughty boy; he pulled the cat's tail, bullied his sisters and the servants, and was so 'wilful' and disrespectful that his parents were greatly distressed at the certainty of his criminal end. Fortunately, however, he broke his leg while

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climbing a tree on the Sabbath day, and after that he was an ennobled character, and went to Rugby, where he influenced all the younger boys for good. But almost more beloved than any other was a rare book called *Old Deccan Days*; this was a volume of Hindu folk tales, collected and published by an English lady, living in the Deccan, whose children had listened spellbound to these stories told by their ayah. They are tales of rajahs and their queens, of princesses in distress, of tailors and potters, ogres and fairies. Much in them is similar to the folk-tales of our Western world. Step-mothers are cruel, and step-sisters treacherous, younger sisters are cleverer and more beautiful than their elder sisters, ogres — only in India they are called rakshas — are invariably stupid and easily outwitted, and the cunning jackal, like our fox, tricks the larger and more stupid tiger and alligator. Yet beneath this superficial resemblance one is aware of a fundamental cleavage between the two conceptions of life. Here is a world ordered by Brahminism, a world steeped, as Chesterton describes it, in the 'ultimate unmorality . . . the startling insensibility in ethics' of Brahminism. I do not mean that virtue does not usually triumph over evil, but rather that a different conception of virtue prevails. The story of King Vicram, for instance, who, in order to demonstrate his devotion to the God Ganpat, throws himself head first from the top of the God's temple, is wholly Hindoo, and his conception of a meritorious action completely alien to ours. It must be admitted, however, that the practice of polygamy does make the storyteller's task easier, for it solves the problem of the Eternal Triangle merely by abolishing it. How simple to ensure lasting felicity for all the characters when one can end a story thus . . . 'It was then agreed by all that Logedas Rajah should on that day be newly married to his two wives and should also marry the six other beautiful Princesses . . . and they all lived very happily ever after.'

Our upbringing was curiously old-fashioned when compared with that of other children of the same generation. In that remote corner we were shut away from modern educational tendencies, and — *Old Deccan Days* notwithstanding — a Victorian flavour

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clung about our nursery and permeated our early lessons. For seven years we had an English governess whom my parents had brought out with them from England. To her was entrusted the main part of our early education, reading, writing, French, sewing, music, history and general knowledge. Believe it or not, we had a volume of those questions and answers so dear to our grandparents, on the lines of Magnall's Questions, and sometimes as a punishment we had to memorize so many pages of *The Child's Guide to Knowledge*; I still remember the first page.

Q. 'Who made the World?'

A. 'The great and good God.'

Q. 'Did He make you as well?'

A. 'Yes, He did.'

Q. 'Do you not wish to know more about this wonderful world in which you have been placed?'

A. 'Yes, very much.' (Little liar!).

Q. 'Tell me then, what are the chief diseases of wheat?'

A. 'Rust, blight and mildew.'

I don't think I derived much benefit from Magnall's disciple, even though I know the chief diseases of wheat, but I have never ceased to be grateful for having been made to learn by heart the names and dates of the Kings of England, which make the best framework for an accurate knowledge of English History. Our first history book was *Little Arthur's History of England*, which led us along its Whig pathway as far as Mary Tudor's reign. Little Arthur, however, did not dignify that unhappy Queen by her official title, but with childlike bluntness always referred to her as 'Bloody Mary'. I thought it a delightful epithet, and rolled it round and round my tongue, savouring its rounded perfection. At lunch one day I sat murmuring the name to myself; suddenly a storm broke over my defenceless head and my father arose in wrath, demanding where that child was picking up, not mark you, bad language, but—such 'grossly inaccurate' history? Little Arthur was cremated the same day.

'Old-fashioned' or not, Miss Gegan taught us all to read at an

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earlier age than are many children to-day, subjected to the most up-to-date methods. And she managed to instil a considerable amount of history, English and geography, and in such a way that most of my knowledge acquired then has remained imbedded in my memory. She stimulated our interest, and made our lessons enjoyable, that is, with the exception of arithmetic, a subject I hated, and at which I was always useless. My ability in arithmetic may be gauged when I confess that I still cannot add up without the aid of my ten fingers. The blackest memories of my childhood are connected with those arithmetic lessons, in which I was constantly punished for being naughty and lazy, most unjustly, since I was really groping in a fog of bewilderment. However, those dismal moments were outweighed by the hours of pleasure we had in poetry, in drawing, and above all, in our sketching expeditions.

Our classical education was begun, by my father, almost as soon as we could read. The first Latin words I learnt were two proverbs and they have stuck in my memory. '*Mala gallina, malum ovum*', '*Via trita, via tuta*'. The Lord's Prayer and the Magnificat were our next steps in Latin, and from them we proceeded to alternate readings of the Vulgate and Caesar's Commentaries, and a little later, to the Greek Testament. We never learnt any formal Latin Grammar, but instead were subjected to a peculiar form of torture known as 'Latin Gabble'. This consisted of learning by heart every day, and repeating with accuracy and extreme rapidity, two or three sentences which illustrated some particular construction such as the Ablative Absolute or Accusative and Infinitive. Daddy's theory was that, if we knew these 'specimen' sentences so well that we could gabble them parrotwise, they would recur automatically to our minds when we had to form or construe similar constructions. How I did hate that 'gabble'.

During the war, a charming Swiss-French lady, Mlle Hubert, came to live with us and taught us French. 'Saparlipopette. Quel accent!' was her first unpremeditated exclamation of horror on first hearing us speak French, which greatly wounded Miss Gegan's feelings. Later, however, Mademoiselle made amends by admitting that Miss Gegan had given us a good working basis

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of French, and harmony was restored. On her arrival, a new trial was inflicted on us, as we were made to speak French whenever she was present. In time this ceased to worry us, and we chattered away with considerable fluency and inaccuracy.

She was a delightful addition to our household, and to Taunggyi; witty and vivacious, yet even-tempered and impartial. She had magic fingers where sewing and dressmaking were concerned. I have known her rush down to the bazaar on Saturday morning, and return with a length of material, cut it out to the accompaniment of a barrage of 'Saparlipopettes', borrow mother's sewing-machine, and wear the finished product to the Club that evening.

When the war was over, Miss Gegan and Mademoiselle left us, and daddy and mother took up our education until we all came to England. Mother introduced us to Shakespeare, Tennyson and Keats, and a general outline of English literature; daddy continued our drawing lessons, classics and history; a delightful French lady, a connection of the du Mauriers, gave us French lessons twice a week, and all kinds of people struggled, quite ineffectually, to teach me mathematics.

So, in bits and pieces we were educated. A slight flippancy in some of my previous observations may have conveyed the impression that our education was antiquated and mere 'vain repetition'. In justice and gratitude to all concerned I must emphasize that it was quite the reverse. It may have been untidy, at times haphazard, it was cut to no standard pattern and was certainly lopsided. But, mathematics apart, it was varied and stimulating, and in literature and classics especially we were well grounded. Certainly, when we came to England we could hold our own easily among other girls, and, never having been subjected to a single examination, we came with unstaled minds to the English school curriculum. And, when I compare it with the rather rigid English educational system, I think we got a lot of fun out of our somewhat erratic and unconventional schooling.

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V

The friendly figures of our servants move through the background of my childish memories. I see the bony form of our peon, Guldin, like some angular character in a tapestry. He was extremely tall and thin, with a cast in one eye, and was our very faithful servant for sixteen years. He acted as messenger and general factotum; he filled, trimmed and lighted the oil lamps, cleaned and polished the saddlery, locked up at night, 'chipped' our potatoes for us, and cooked us delicious chupatties, with blobs of fiery curry on them. Chupatties are flat, thin cakes made of unleavened flour — if well made they are most succulent, and Guldin's were superb. When we were very small he would sing us a Hindustani lullaby, which I still remember:

Gari wallah, jaldi jao,
Tum ko ham ko marega,
Hamra baba deckega,
Tum ko ham ko marega.

Driver, driver, hurry up,
Or I shall beat you,
My little baby is looking at you,
I shall beat you.

Mother tells me that we had a succession of ayahs, Indian and Burmese, but I remember only two, Ma Hla and Ma Hlon. Ma Hla was a remarkable woman. Not only was she an excellent ayah, the best we ever had, but she possessed qualifications which one does not usually expect in an ayah. She could drive elephants, for one thing. Her husband was a mahout or elephant driver and from him she had learnt all about elephants, and if need had arisen she could have scrambled up on the creature's neck and directed it with competence. And, to add to the tale of her accomplishments, she was a professional dancer, and that, in Burma, means something. On wet days she would dance for our amusement in

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the nursery, her supple figure swaying, arms and elbows crooked in the traditional attitude of the ancient dances. The traveller to Angkhor who has paused before the sculptures on those resurrected temples has seen those identical postures, but immobilized in stone, whereas we watched them in all their living grace. Sometimes daddy and mother, returning unexpectedly early from a walk or from the Club, surprised us in the nursery, Ma Hla dancing like David before the ark, we children pigtailed, pinafores, saucer-eyed, watching enraptured, and behind us, equally enraptured, the house servants, chuprassi, cook, steward, gardener, all of them oblivious of time and duties. When dad and mother appeared in the doorway the spell was broken. Ma Hla stopped abruptly and tried to look as wooden and as ayah-like as possible; back to his kitchen slunk the cook, the gardener to his lawful occasions, and Guldin's face resumed its wonted expression of profound gloom as he slithered away to light the lamps and to meditate afresh upon the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Eventually Ma Hla had to leave, not because she was a professional dancer, but because like so many Burmans, she was an incurable gambler. For weeks on end she lived a righteous and sober life, and then suddenly the lust for gambling possessed her, and she disappeared without warning, and for two or three days the nursery knew her not. Then she returned, haggard from lack of sleep, penniless, bereft of necklace, bracelets and earstuds, and with much weeping, she would beseech mother to forgive her and take her back and give her a week's wages in advance, and would vow never to gamble any more. But there were limits even to mother's forbearance, and finally, after an orgy of gambling which left us ayahless for a fortnight, mother refused to take her back and she left us with tears, and we wept too.

Our next ayah, Ma Hlon, stayed with us until a year or two before we left Burma. There was nothing glamorous about her, a woman with a plain, pleasant face, deeply pitted with pock marks. Though she did pull my hair when she brushed and plaited it, I have the tenderest memories of her. She took us out for walks, played with us, bathed and dressed us when we were

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little, mended our clothes, and concealed our misdeeds from avenging authority; we in turn loved and tormented her. I can still see her sitting on the nursery floor, with her inevitable mending, while we sprawled round her, begging her to say 'Cleopatra's Needle'. Ma Hlon could not pronounce an 'l', and we knew it. 'Maree, Nerrie, you bad girl, go way, I not say it.' 'Say it, Ma Hlon, just once, Cleopatra's Needle.' Eventually she would give way and growl 'Criopata Neerer', to our immense amusement. Her supple fingers were wonderful at removing neuralgia and headache. As a child I had occasional blinding headaches, and I remember her ministrations with gratitude. Her technique, from the masseuse's point of view, was unorthodox, but she had a knack of finding the seat of the trouble and after her long fingers had probed and pummelled for a few minutes the pain had miraculously disappeared. Another of her remedies for treating headache was akin to modern spinal manipulation, in principle, but not in method. Instead of massaging the spine with her hands, she laid the patient face downwards on the floor or bed, and then walked up and down the spine, 'kneading' it with her bare feet. It was a most effective remedy, and both comforting and soporific. This form of massage is universal among the Burmans. They call it 'a-kneik' or 'shampoo'; it is a standard remedy for rheumatism and many other ailments, and is administered chiefly by women, who seem to have an instinctive knowledge of the nervous and muscular system. It is not uncommon to see, on the open veranda of a house, a patient stretched face downwards while a woman shampoos his back with her bare feet. Half an hour of this treatment will cure an acute attack of lumbago.

Ma Hlon was the wife of our 'loogale' or houseboy, and for years they led a cat and dog life. They both had fearful tempers, and many a time we heard bloodcurdling yells from the servants' quarters behind the house, and Ma Hlon would come sobbing into the nursery with blackened eyes or bruised cheeks. Whose fault it was we could never ascertain; they would both be scolded, threatened with dismissal, and peace would reign for a time, until there was a fresh quarrel and further 'incidents'. I suspect that

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Ma Hlon cast a gay and roving eye, and that Loogale resented it. Gradually his reprisals assumed a more threatening character. When he grew really angry, Loogale went almost berserk. One day while we were having our afternoon rest, he charged into the bedroom, waving a naked 'dah' (knife) and emitting a stream of unprintable Burmese. He glared round the room looking for Ma Hlon, then rushing to the wardrobe, dashed it open, thrust the dah inside and hurled himself out of the door again. He was so blind with rage that I don't think he even saw us, but if Ma Hlon had been there I am sure she would have been disembowelled on the spot. We were pleasurably thrilled at this departure from routine, and did not even mention it to the grown-ups. That night the dah vanished from the wardrobe, and nothing came of the incident. But one day Ma Hlon ran screaming into the drawing-room covered with blood, and pursued by Loogale with the same dah in his hand. Mother and daddy felt that something must be done about it. They were reluctant to dismiss either of them, for they were both good servants as far as work was concerned. Ma Hlon herself solved our dilemma by announcing that she would divorce Loogale, and marry the chief clerk in the telegraph office. By that time we were old enough to dispense with the services of an ayah, so she left us, married her chief clerk and settled down to a less precarious domesticity than she had hitherto enjoyed.

Our cooks were the impermanent members of our staff. Good cooks were rare and in much demand, and had no scruples in leaving one household if another should offer them higher wages. So cooks came and went. The one I recollect as staying the longest was a Mugh from South India, hirsute in appearance and mild of nature. He was extremely small in stature, and his wife extremely large and muscular, so it was not surprising that he always wore an apprehensive expression. She seemed to spend the greater part of the day in the kitchen planted four square on a stool, and giving him a shrill piece of her mind. The kitchen was a separate building and connected with the house by a roofed passage-way. This practice of having a separate building is very

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usual in India, and its advantages and disadvantages are fairly evenly balanced. The noises that issue from most kitchens in the East are as irritating as a neighbour's loud-speaker. The sound of eggs being beaten and chickens being killed, and the time of day being passed — for it is of course unreasonable to expect a cook to work all day without periodic visits from his wives, girl friends, children and cronies! And what are pots and pans for but to be clattered? And every cook likes to sing in a high nasal monotone as he beats his 'cook mate' to make him tractable and the steak to make it tender. For these and other reasons a kitchen as far removed as possible from the house is desirable. On the other hand, food tends to lose its heat when carried twenty or thirty yards along a passage that, except for the roof, is open to all the winds of heaven, and the most aspiring soufflé sinks. And on a pitch black night in the wet season when the rain cataracts off the corrugated roof, and ricochets up from the ground in liquid mud it is no easy task to carry food from kitchen to house and arrive undamaged and unsoused.

To return to our Mugh. Twice a week he slung a basket over his shoulder and went off to the open-air market at the other end of the town. Taunggyi boasted two market days, called respectively Big Bazaar day and Little Bazaar day and the week's supply of food had to be bought on these two days. On Big Bazaar day cook bought meat, rice, vegetables, salt, ghee, or clarified butter for frying, fruit and so on. Little Bazaar day was a smaller affair and only vegetables, fruit and sometimes fish could be procured. The fish was lake or river fish, looking and tasting like mud. The meat was usually tough and stringy and my dislike of meat dates from my childhood. I can recall how I held gobbets of liver, brain or 'hump' in my mouth, loathing the idea of chewing them and releasing the abhorred flavour, until at last I had to steel myself, and swallowed them in an unmasticated lump. Occasionally I managed to abstract them and drop them into the expectant mouth of one of the many cats and dogs who huddled round the table legs, waiting, not in vain. To atone for the quality of the meat the fruit and vegetables were excellent. From

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the countryside round, the Shan and Taungthu farmers came in to Taunggyi bazaar, bringing baskets heaped with pineapples, oranges, bananas, mangoes, sweet-limes, mangosteens, guavas, sticks of sugar cane, cobs of Indian corn, sticky 'ladies fingers' as we called okhras, chillies, and chunks of 'juggery', the unrefined sugar of the sugar cane. All the other Sahib's cooks were at the bazaar, and a pleasant half hour was spent in comparing the merits and demerits of their respective masters and mistresses, and in settling a schedule of prices. Any cook could charge his mistress more than the agreed price, and if he could get away with it so much the better, but woe betide the cook who tried to undercut prices and spoilt the market for the others. Sooner or later he would make things too uncomfortable for himself and find it advisable to try a change of air.

Back from the bazaar, cook spread his purchases on the kitchen table for mother's inspection. Then the store-room was unlocked, and the day's requirements of flour, sugar, currants, rice and so on was weighed and handed out, and back to the kitchen went the cook, leaving mother to mix her cakes, inspect her milk, and glance at the cheese to see if the whey had yet been pressed out.

Every household had to be its own baker, grocer and dairy. No milk bottles were left on the back doorstep, no grocer's van called for orders and deliveries. In the field behind the house grazed our cows on whom we depended for milk, butter, cream and cheese. Every evening they were milked and the milk, brought in huge bowls, was immediately scalded. Some was put aside for drinking, some kept for cream. The bowls of thick yellow Devonshire cream that stood in the store-room were a pleasant sight; and the quality of the milk can be gauged by the fact that we always had plenty of cream to spare as well as ample supplies of butter. And as the Mad Hatter would have said, if he had come to tea with us, it was the Best Butter.

During the war when all imported foods became impossibly dear, or ceased altogether, mother took to making her own cheeses. They rather resembled cream cheeses, and although not highly flavoured were quite pleasant to eat.

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As well as cheese and butter, mother made her own vinegar, and baked all the bread from her own yeast. The yeast bottles stood in a row on the store-room floor, their corks tied down as for ginger pop, and occasionally we were startled by a bang as the lively yeast sent the cork shooting out of the bottle, and foamed creaming out over the floor. She made the yeast from bananas, sugar, flour and warm water, and once a ferment had been set up she continued to propagate the yeast day by day and so her bread was always fresh, and delicious as only good home-made bread can be.

Another important member of the household was the dhobi or washerman. He and his family lived in a couple of huts on the edge of the compound, and all our washing was done on the brink of a well behind our house. To have the family washing done on the spot is the most elementary precaution to be taken in the tropics, where, if the laundry were sent out of the compound, it would inevitably be washed in some noisome stream in juxtaposition with smallpox and cholera patients. So, twice a week, the dhobi came to the house to collect the laundry; he counted out the garments under mother's supervision, tied them all together in a sheet, and looking like some eastern version of Santa Claus, with his white beard, flowing robes and bulging sack, he carried it off to his house. An hour later we would hear the clothes being washed; a steady pounding on stones, accompanied by a nasal singing, is the dhobi's recipe for removing dirt, and buttons simultaneously. Except during the rains, clothes dry quickly under a tropic sun, and the following day the washing would be returned, looking, on the whole, astonishingly clean and presentable after the primitive processes to which it had been subjected.

In turn, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob became our dhobi. In our first years in Taunggyi Abraham used to do the washing; when advancing years palsied his frame his son Isaac, white haired and white bearded like his father, took his place. In our latter years, Isaac abdicated in favour of Jacob whose beard was only just beginning to sprout, and who celebrated the official recognition

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of his capabilities as a washerman by taking to himself a pretty young wife. The nuptials occupied several days, and culminated in a procession to our house. The bride, loaded with jewellery, dressed in scarlet and orange draperies, and bashfully squinting down her nose-ring, was presented to us by her bridegroom in wedding garment of snowy white with wreaths, necklace and anklets of marigolds.

As in all Indian households the sweeper was the humblest and most pathetic of figures. Born in the Untouchable classes, and reared in the knowledge that neither in this life nor in any succeeding life, however meritorious, can he ever be anything but despised and outcast, the Indian sweeper creeps about the compound; a dirty, unkempt figure whose badge of office is a native broom and a pillar of dust; reviled and avoided by the other Hindu servants, and whose only friend is his caste-free master. In Burma the lot of the sweeper is a little happier, for the Burmese have no caste and, except where their attitude has been influenced by Indian servants, they regard the sweeper as a human being, and not as the scapegoat of the Hindu cosmography. Our sweeper I remember as a gentle figure with the dignified bearing of a Doctor of Theology, and always a smile for us children and a 'Salaam, Baba!'

Maung Hsan, the gardener was a square figure, lacking all but a couple of teeth, and with the vilest of squints. He was helped in the garden by Kantu, the stable boy, who was long and thin as the former was short and thickset. Maung Hsan regarded us with a certain amount of disapproval which we reciprocated, as he had strong views on the question of strawberries and used to report us to headquarters when our raids on the strawberry beds had been too thorough. Kantu's principles were not as rigid, and his cheerful, rather sly smile beamed out reassuringly when he caught us at some illicit act. He was always ready to cut us a bamboo bow and arrow, to make and fly our kites, or to build us a hut at the bottom of the garden in which we could play houses with complete realism.

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V I

My father's passion for weapons which I have already mentioned was not purely academic and artistic. On the contrary it was his boast that he could use, with some degree of skill, every one of the weapons which adorned his walls. There was not a gun or pistol in the house, antique or modern, flintlock, matchlock, eighteenth-century duelling pistol, Purdey, or revolver, which was not kept clean and oiled and with whose every idiosyncrasy of firing and sighting he was not familiar. He was a first class shot, and yet he hated blood sports, and although there was good shooting to be had around Taunggyi he never shot bird or beast for pleasure. To kill for food or in self-defence was justifiable, he considered, and on walks through the jungle he always carried a loaded revolver in his pocket. But the bright-eyed woodcock in the spinney behind our house returned each year to nest, unmolested and unafraid, a friend and not a victim. Daddy could lay his hand at a moment's notice upon gun and ammunition, and no crisis would have caught him unprepared. One day a rabid dog came into our garden. I was on the veranda and saw it running across the lawn, head low and muzzle foam-flecked; the gardener dropped his spade and sprinted, shouting, towards the house, and before I had realized what it was all about I saw daddy, his face smothered in shaving lather, come round the corner of the house, and fire at the dog, bringing it down in its stride.

Arms to him were more than a mere hobby; like our forefathers he regarded them as part of a man's estate and a measure of his self-respect. I mention them here because they shaped and coloured our daily life to an astonishing degree. From babyhood we were accustomed to the sight and sound of arms; we were reared on gun-oil and lulled to sleep by bangs and reports. As we grew older we were constantly required to help in feathering arrows, cutting patches for bullets, painting or mending targets, or digging in the shooting-butt for spent bullets, and melting the

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lead down to make new bullets in daddy's bullet mould. We saw nothing peculiar in any of these activities, and thought it perfectly normal to live in a house that was a cross between a museum and an armoury. We were quite accustomed, on our walks, to see dad pick up a stick and hurl it away like a javelin, or suddenly stop and thrust his walking stick, which had become a rapier, into the vitals of an invisible antagonist. And at meals, when he absently made a quick cut and thrust in the air with his soup spoon, none of us even looked up. Only when we came to England did I realize that daddy was not cut on the standardized pattern of our neighbours; and being then desperately anxious not to appear 'odd' at the school into which I had been pitchforked within a week of landing at Plymouth, I suffered some agonies over his eccentricities. I remember the amusement he occasioned among the holiday makers at Lyme Regis by his sling. He used to wander along the beach selecting round pebbles, stop and sling half a dozen out to sea and then wander on again. And when our fortnight at the sea was over he took back with him enough selected portions of Lyme Regis shingle to enable him to continue slinging on an unfrequented corner of Durdham Downs.

An ancient weapon which he loves and taught us to revere was the bow. I think I learned to string a bow and loose an arrow as soon as I could walk, for I never remember a time when I could not do both, and though our bows were bamboo, and our arrows were feathered in Shan manner with a sliver of bamboo we were taught, to string and pull them in a way that Roger Ascham would have approved.

Though archery was and is his dearest pastime he found time for another ancient sport, namely quoits. And by quoits I do not mean the harmless rubber ring beloved by deck stewards, but the Sikh war-quoit or 'chakra', that steel circlet which, when sharpened and thrown accurately, can sever a man's head. Years before, in Rangoon, a Sikh named Jemadar Ganga Singh had first taught him to throw the chakra and to this day he practises it. It is a beautiful weapon and an ancient one; in its present form it dates from the tenth century, but its history goes back so much

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further into the past that the Hindoos ascribe its invention to 'the Gods'. Barbosa travelling through India in 1511 describes it thus: 'In the kingdom of Dely, they have some steel wheels which they call chacarani, two fingers broad, sharp outside like knives, and the face of these is the size of a small plate, and they carry seven or eight of these each put on the left arm, and they take one and put it on the finger of the right hand and so they hurl it at their enemies.' My father is of the opinion that the ultimate ancestor of the chakra was the spoked wheel of Vishnu which is still used as a caste mark and an emblem on Vishnavite temples. In time of war the Sikhs kept the quoit razor-sharp, and it must have been a terrifying weapon. Daddy's quoits were not sharpened, but nevertheless we kept at a respectful distance when he went out into the garden to practise. I shall remember him as I saw him then, when he sent the shining circlets singing through the sunlit air to come at last hissing to rest.

In spite of his absorption in the ancient forms of sport and war, daddy took no less interest in modern weapons, rifle, revolver and pistol, at all of which he was adept. In one corner of our garden he had made a small range and there he spent evening after evening at shooting practice. I was still of tender years when I asked if I might fire his elephant gun, the biggest of his collection. He held it against my shoulder, sighted it for me and helped me to squeeze the trigger. The report half stunned me, and the recoil knocked me backwards and my bruised shoulder confirmed my resolution for several succeeding days not to fire any more rifles.

Some evenings daddy came striding across from the school, and as he passed our nursery windows he shouted to us that he was going to the rifle range and any who cared could come. In half an hour Kantu had brought the trap round to the veranda steps. The rifles and box of ammunition were pushed under the seat, we piled in, Kantu balanced himself on the back step and we clattered off. Our pony trap, or 'tum-tum', was one of the most uncomfortable vehicles imaginable; it always appeared to be falling to pieces, but like the wingless bed-bug of the Yankee rhyme — 'it got there all the same'. In the wet season a home-made roof was erected

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over the seat, consisting of four bamboo poles lashed upright to the sides of the trap and supporting a stretched square of oilcloth. It was the finishing touch to a sufficiently comic affair, and it was little wonder that the station smiled when it saw and heard us coming. When the wind was strong the oilcloth roof blew away, and then the trap was halted, Kantu leapt off, collected the roof, tied it on again, and off we went once more.

Arrived at the rifle range which lay about four miles out of Taunggyi, the horse was unharnessed and turned loose to graze. Kantu trotted off to the butts to set up the targets and to signal the score, and daddy settled down to shoot. We, meanwhile, wandered through the neighbouring glades and thickets looking for lilies and ginger orchids, and gorging ourselves with wild figs. When shooting was over we raced down to the butts where Kantu gave us rides on the target trolleys till it was time to go. Then the trap was harnessed and we turned homewards, slowly at first along the grass track, skirting boulders, tree stumps and bamboo clumps, crushing the fallen figs, black with ants and rotting seeds, until the macadam road was reached, where Kantu left the horse's head, hopped on to his step and we rattled homewards. There was an astonishing difference between Scallywag's pace going to the rifle range and returning, and he had a tendency to bolt back to his stable. On one occasion I remember he got the bit properly between his teeth and tore down the long winding slope into Taunggyi; the trap rocked violently, we clung on, I at any rate speechless with fright; dad's face was grim as he hung on to the reins in an attempt to stop Scallywag before we reached the right-angled bend, where the trap would have been sent crashing down the hillside. He managed it, but only just in time, and Scallywag stood waiting sulkily while Kantu came limping after us with bleeding legs.

One evening when we were returning from the range we saw advancing towards us, from the hills on our left, two waterspouts. They reared, twisting pillars, between sullen sky and sombre earth, and above them maniac clouds whirled and danced. The two pillars came towards us, then turned sharply to the right and

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away from us. But the lowering clouds, as if alive and charged with malice, parted company with the pillars of rain and pursued us closely as we raced homewards. They spat raindrops at us, but we won the race by a narrow margin and reached our gate just as the pursuing cloud threw its watery sheet around us.

A few miles out of Taunggyi was a little Taungthu village. It lay back from the main road and was screened from it by clumps of bamboos. Pigs rooted among the bamboo stumps and pidogs prowled round the huts and announced us with the hysterical falsetto bark peculiar to the 'pi'. We used to find a shady spot on the outskirts of the village away from the smells, dirt and noise, and in a few minutes the whole village had heard of our arrival and had come to have a look. The children congregated in clumps at a cautious distance, and discussed us in whispers, picking their noses and scratching the sores on their legs. The men squatted on their haunches chewing betel and spitting. The women toiling in the fields around the village turned to stare, and one by one left their work to enjoy a few minutes free entertainment. When we spoke to them they giggled shyly and, placing their hands over their faces, peeped at us through the parted fingers. Some of the girls would not have been bad looking were it not for their decayed and discoloured teeth, and for the large goitre which disfigured their throat. Their black costumes made a sombre note against the brilliant sky and the bamboo foliage. They wore the distinctive Taungthu dress, consisting of a short black skirt and loose 'jumper' with pointed neck and elbow length sleeves, and black armlets and leggings. Their heavy black turbans had coloured tassels, and they carried their dowries about on them in the shape of silver necklaces and earrings. Some of these earrings were so weighty that the earlobes had been considerably elongated. I remember one girl who wore a necklace formed of numerous thin circular discs of silver strung together so that they overlapped one another, and rustled gently with every movement of her neck.

We often came to this village on horseback or in the old 'tum-tum', and very soon the villagers took us for granted, as did the village poultry. Not long after we had unpacked cushions, rugs

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and lunch baskets the chickens began to arrive, singly or in clutches, darting their hungry eyes and beaks everywhere, scratching and squabbling over the bits we threw to them. When it was clear that no more was forthcoming, they clustered in bunches in the shade of the tum-tum, or perched on the shafts and sank into noonday somnolence.

The reason for our frequent visits was that an old blacksmith lived there who did all kinds of work for my father. He was very dirty, and when he smiled he showed a mouthful of black and broken teeth, but he had such an engaging grin and was such a friendly old chap that we forgave the dirt. Less easy to forget were the fleas with which the sanded floor of his hut was always hopping and whose numbers were not noticeably diminished by the specimens which we usually carried homewards on our persons. This mat hut was both his dwelling house and his workshop. His equipment was of the simplest. A charcoal fire in a hole scooped out of the sanded floor was his furnace, his bellows were bamboo pipes worked by hand, and his tools, few and primitive had been beaten out by himself and tempered in his own furnace. The hoes, spades and forks used in the village were his handwork, and he made traps too, and knives and very excellent spear heads. The work my father gave him, chiefly on guns, was more exacting, but he seldom spoiled anything he undertook and most of it was extremely well done. The tools he used would have been despised by an English workman but the results he achieved with them were a triumph of skill and ingenuity. Nothing daunted him provided he had a model to copy; I do not think he ever made a gun barrel for daddy, but he made every other part of a gun, locks, hammers, and stocks of soft native wood.

His son was a skilled ivory carver and carved two ivory dah handles for my father, one of which is now in the South Kensington Museum. The designs were his own; he designed as he carved; the ivory seemed to unfold into flower beneath his fingers. When I see those dahs I wonder whether that son recalls them with sadness; they were his last work, for he went blind. What a desolation! To sit beneath the bamboos with idle fingers which once

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broke up smooth ivory into a hundred fantastic shapes, to see, instead of the tracery of leaves against the sky and under your chisel, only darkness.

Craftsmen like 'our' old blacksmith-carpenter and his son were by no means uncommon in the Shan states. The Shan blacksmiths and silversmiths in particular have always been famed for their skill not only in their own country but also in Burma, and the other tribes who are their neighbours among the Shan hills are almost as famous. Apart from their technical skill the most astonishing quality of these grubby and untutored hillsmen is their resourcefulness. If they haven't got something they particularly want they make it, and if they haven't got the tools for making it they set to work to make the tools. The most striking instance of this talent, almost amounting to genius, for improvisation, adaptation, inventiveness, is seen in the gun industry of Hsam Tao.

Hsam Tao is a district in Kengtung state, which is adjacent to the Indo-China border, very remote, and, until the advent of the motor car, almost untouched by Western civilization. And yet in three small villages there, a domestic industry existed, which, for more than fifty years, supplied hundreds of hunters throughout the Shan states with guns. Only a few families in these villages made them, and the method of manufacture was jealously guarded. Soft and malleable iron was brought over the border from China; a master blacksmith made the barrel, heating and hammering and welding it over a charcoal fire, while other lesser smiths made the lock, hammer and trigger. Finally, the barrel was polished by friction on a smooth stone, and the stock was stained with chestnut bark.

As one might expect, these guns, made under such primitive conditions and not being rifled were not very accurate. That they were made at all, and could be used, is sufficiently astonishing, and I find a romance in these clumsy weapons, for they are a product of man's 'unconquerable mind'.

Another weapon, which was also made in Hsam Tao and once formed part of my father's collection of arms, is a composite knife

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and pistol. It is a curious weapon; the percussion lock is made in imitation of a Tower lock, and the barrel of the gun serves also as the handle of a knife whose blade is sheathed in the gun stock. Yet another weapon from his collection, now in the keeping of the India Museum, was also brought from Hsam Tao, though it was not made there. It is a Chinese 'sword-hook,' which came into the possession of Mr. Grose while Assistant Superintendent of Kengtung Province, and he gave it to my father to add to his collection of Eastern arms. It was a generous gift, for these sword hooks, called lik-lem in Shan and Ko-lyen or 'bent-irons' in Chinese, are exceedingly rare, and my father has never seen another of its kind either in Burma or in any arms collection in England. That they are scarce is hardly astonishing, for they are the weapon of dacoits (brigands) and in China men found carrying them are hanged on sight.

V I I I

The Crag and hills round Taunggyi afforded an endless variety of walks and rides. The whole of the Crag had been made into a Forest Reserve, and so miles of lovely trees had been saved from inevitable destruction at the hands of the native farmer. The method of cultivation which has been followed from time immemorial in Burma can, in a few years, turn a tract of thickly forested country into bare, rocky slopes, scoured by monsoon torrents which carry away the once fertile soil. The system is, first, to clear a portion of land of every form of growth, which is then burnt for manure; in this cleared tract of land the crops are sown; if the yield proves good the same patch of soil is used again the following year, and is then discarded and another patch of land is cleared. Where the population is thick, the abandoned patch cannot lie fallow long enough to recuperate; so the wasteful process goes on; for a few handfuls of rice or ground nuts, tons of timber are annually destroyed, acres of soil are impoverished, and the harvests grow poorer and poorer. On the slopes of the

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low hills to the west of Taunggyi, the Shan and Taungthu farmers scratched the soil, and sowed their crops, but the starved land yielded only a scanty return, and there were wide tracts where the farmers had at last given up their discouraging attempts and allowed the exhausted land to lie fallow. Soon these tracts were covered with coarse grass, where harebells and ginger orchids, St. John's wort and anemones swayed lightly, among scrambling raspberry brambles, which, astonishingly, in spite of the surrounding poverty, yielded abundant fruit. We called them raspberries, but many people maintained that they were yellow blackberries, for in shape and growth they resembled the latter fruit. Whatever the name, they were delicious, and when the season came round we used to go out on picking expeditions and come back with our baskets filled with the yellow fruit, which we ate with sugar and cream, in tarts, or as jam and jelly.

As we grew older we were allowed wander to about alone on these low hills, where except for an occasional snake, there was nothing to harm us. But we were never allowed alone on the Crag, whose shadowy thickets were the home of deer, pig, bear and leopard. With dad and mother, however, we walked for miles along the jungle paths, winding in and out among the rocks, jumping streams, dabbling in pools, watching hopefully for monkeys or squirrels to run across the path. Occasionally, if dusk were falling before we got home, a barking deer would step out on to the path, to be gone in a flash almost before we had realized he was there. Once the forest officer and his wife, walking in broad daylight through the reserve, turned a corner and there lying across the path, was a leopardess watching her cubs tumbling about her; she made no effort to move, only gazing dispassionately at the intruders, who retreated, and continued their walk by a different path.

Even if no animals were to be seen, there were always flowers, and we used to have competitions to see who could count the most lilies or orchids. We were taught not to pull up plants by the roots, nor to pick them in careless quantities, but when the season of chocolate and madonna lilies came round we were not satisfied

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unless we could bring home enough to fill the drawing-room vases. The 'Madonna' lilies, as we called them, were not the madonna lily of English gardens, but a smaller, more delicate bloom, very shy, trembling and fragrant, like the lilies which blossom in the pictures of Perugini and Fra Lippo Lippi. The chocolate lilies, whose real name we never discovered, and which I have not heard of anywhere else, were of the same shape and size as a tiger lily; they had the same backward curling petals, but in colour were a warm yellow, palely touched with green; the centre was a deep chocolate brown, which overflowed and splashed some of its rich colour on to the petals. We tried to grow them in our garden, but without success; homesick for their cool jungle they died.

One night, daddy who had been sitting up late, glanced out of the drawing-room window, and saw a faint flicker of fire creeping up the face of the Crag. Servants were roused and sent flying to the Resident, forest office and military police barracks. Quick as they were, by the time they arrived at the spot, the fire was beyond control; it was at the end of the hot season, and the wood was like tinder. All that night the fire roared, and the sky was red above the Crag; for three days and nights the fire-fighters toiled to keep the fire from spreading over the whole of the reserve, and eventually they won, but not before a tract of several miles had been reduced to cinders. Though nothing could be proved, it was almost certain that the fire had been started, as an act of revenge, by some forest wardens who shortly before had been dismissed.

At the foot of the Crag and gently touched by the fingers of the jungle lay the English cemetery. Sometimes our walks took us past the low brick wall which surrounded it, and then we would beg our governess to let us go in, and we would wander around among the graves, spelling out the names and texts on the headstones. Catholics were buried at one end, Protestants at the other end. On All Souls' Eve, following an ancient tradition, we put lighted candles on the graves. We children loved the expedition and would have been bitterly disappointed if anything had happened to prevent it. Just before sunset, carrying baskets full of

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candles, we walked up the road curving past the military police barracks, then, cutting across the golf course, came to the cemetery. By the time we had arrived, the sun had set, and shadows were beginning to wreath the headstones. On every grave we placed a candle, while dad and mother went round lighting them. When we left it was quite dark, the candles flickered in the breeze, and the solitary separate lights made the cemetery seem lonelier than ever. There could be no more peaceful place than that little walled cemetery beneath the Crag; a few snakes glide across the grass, and at night a deer barks or a leopard lounges, yawning, on the graves, but beneath the cracked and lichened stones the dead sleep well in that quiet earth.

We did not forget our pets' cemetery under the oak trees. Directly we returned we ran down to the bottom of the garden and reverently placed a candle on each grave. Bhalu the bear, Pip the rabbit, cats, dogs, white mice, guinea pigs, not one was forgotten on All Souls' Eve, and the candlelight flickered cheerfully on the trunks of the encircling oak trees.

We were always aware of the Crag. It seemed to lean over us, watchful, silent, yet stirring with a hidden life of its own. We saw it in the morning drenched in mist; at noon burnished in brightness yet with undertones of deep shadow; at sunset the shadows stole out, and crept and ran hither and thither up the slopes and lay on the rocks like pools of Indian ink; during the night the whole Crag was unquiet with life; bullfrogs croaked, owls hooted and crickets churred; the trees whispered and sobbed, and a deer would bark and bark and bark. Sometimes, going along the darkened veranda of our house I was seized with a sudden panic at the active blackness surging out from the jungle and would scuttle as fast as my legs would carry me into the lighted sanctuary of dining- or drawing-room. The low hills behind our house were always friendly: the Crag never was; sometimes hostile, always aloof. It lay in the track of rain storms, and during the monsoon we could hear the roar of an approaching deluge several minutes before it reached us. We used to keep our rabbits in a large pen on the lawn and whenever we heard the rain coming up behind

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the Crag we had to run outside and bring them into their hutches. I stood once on the lawn when this had been done, and listened, held there in a kind of fascination. With a million rushing feet the rain came trampling through the forest behind the Crag, and I watched it sweep over the summit and bear down upon our garden. A solid phalanx of water drove past within fifty yards of me, and not a drop touched me.

On one other occasion the Crag seemed to me to put on mortality, when, on the morning of the earthquake, for one awful moment, I saw it shaken out of its immobility and shrug its shoulders.

VIII

What a countryside for picnics, and what picnics we had; they are among the happiest of happy memories. There were so many places, that it was sometimes hard to decide which to choose. The cave in the hills behind our house; we went so often that I could almost have felt my way blindfold down the track which cut so steeply athwart the face of the limestone cliff. We had to tread cautiously for the track was very narrow and crumbly and the hillside fell away sheer beneath us. As we went down, the music of a waterfall sounded louder and louder; then suddenly there was a slit in the face of the rock; it was partly obscured by trailing creepers: we stepped straight from the scorching path into a sunless gloom which set us shivering. When our eyes became accustomed to the twilight we greeted each familiar feature of our beloved cave; the rough steps on the right which climbed to a small white statue of Buddha set on a pinnacle of rock; the stalactites; the low slab of stone where pilgrims laid offerings of flowers and food, and, round the corner where the cave tunnelled away into the earth, two big statues of Buddha, so dreadfully silent and so lonely, I always thought. The cool gloom refreshed our eyes and bodies. When it was time for lunch, Mary always claimed, as her right, a perch beside the little white Buddha; mine was on a broken

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stalagmite, most uncomfortable but I would have no other. While we ate, Maung Hsan and Kantu were saying their prayers, round the corner before the large Buddhas. After we had eaten, some of us slept while others decided to explore the cave; led by the servants with hurricane lamps we groped along the winding tunnel past boulders and pillars, until, squeezing through a narrow opening in the rock, we came into a small chamber and there could go no further. There was a hole in the floor and we dropped pebbles down and listened to them chinking as they bumped downwards to fall at last with a faint plop into a pool far below. I never really liked that expedition into the cave, but always went, and with what a sigh of thankfulness saw the circle of grey light glimmer once more on the outlines of the two Buddhas as we came back from our subterranean gropings. A rest, tea, then there was time for a quick paddle in the pool above the waterfall. The torrent that had, in past ages, carved out our cave had since altered its bed, and now burst out of the rock face a quarter of a mile further down the cliff, spread in a shallow pool and then leapt over a ledge into space. As we climbed homewards we turned for a last look at the waterfall lying like a silver chain upon the bosom of the rock, and bright in the fire of the setting sun.

Loikong, the Taungthu village among the bamboos, was another favourite picnic spot. It had not the romance nor grandeur of our cave, but it was friendly and cheerful. We often went with the American Baptists who had a little mission established there, and after lunch while the rest of us slept or talked or sketched, they visited their converts and held a service in the thatched bamboo chapel. On one occasion the missionaries brought along a friend who was staying with them. She was from some American university and was writing a thesis on something or other. She took a great interest in everything and everybody, and commented on them in a drawling manner which we found most amusing. 'Waal, if that isn't the cutest little cuth-e-dral I've ever seen' she remarked when she first saw the bamboo chapel. Another time when we went to Loikong the daughter of the Anglo-Indian telegraph master came with us. Mary and I were bicycle-mad then,

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and Edna said she too would cycle to Loikong. She little knew what she had bargained for; she had only just learned to ride and the Loikong road was more suited to trick-riders than to beginners. It was a mud road, and the wheels of numerous bullock-carts had worn the surface into a series of ruts some as much as two feet deep. On the narrow ridges between the ruts Mary and I streaked along, and far in our rear Edna pedalled desperately, and, every hundred yards or so, there was a clatter as she and her bicycle crashed into a rut. She was a plucky child, and after each fall picked up herself and the bicycle and, without a word, mounted and wobbled on towards Loikong. She was dusty and bruised but still smiling when she arrived; for a wonder her bicycle was not smashed. Some of the party had come by bullock-cart, and when it was time to go home it was suggested that Edna should pile her bicycle on the back of the cart and either walk or ride in the cart. But she refused, and rode the whole way back to Taunggyi without a fall. I rode behind and watched her so expectantly that twice I dived over the handlebars into the ruts; the second time I got my foot entangled in the spokes and in great mortification sat and waited for Kantu to come and disentangle me. Before he could reach me a Gurkha soldier came to my rescue, and, with his help, and assisted by interested comments from Taungthu passers-by, I heaved myself and the bicycle out of the Valley of Humiliation.

Better than any of the others was an elephant picnic. All elephants were government property, in the charge of the forest officer, but if they were not required by him on his work, he was always willing to lend us two or three. So the invitations would go out, and in the afternoon the picnickers assemble at our house, to wait for the elephants' arrival. We children are waiting at the bottom of the garden for the first glimpse of the elephants as they turn the corner into our road. From behind a clump of bamboos they swing majestically into view, and as they come swaying along the road we rush to the house in time to see them pace up the drive. There they are in our garden, the lovely creatures, dropping ponderously on to their knees in the shade of the apple

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trees, whisking away the flies with a spray they have torn from a hedge, or fidgeting nervously from one large foot to another if a dog ventures too close to them. Elephants hate dogs and horses, and it was odd to see how the placid giants would come 'over all of a twitter' at the mere sight of a dog, however minute. Once I was on an elephant who was goaded out of mistrust into active hatred by the importunate yapping of a pidog. A shiver went through his great bulk; he checked his stride, and for a moment stood shifting from one foot to another; his trunk swished, while with drooping head and angry eyes he watched his diminutive foe, who circled round him like a satellite mosquito. Suddenly there was a lunge, a stamp and a yelp, and then we saw a dog limping away dragging a broken leg.

In our garden, everyone is sorted out in groups of five or six, then each mahout swarms up the tail of his elephant, along the back, and settles himself astride the neck, with his legs tucked behind the huge flapping ears. Obedient to the command, the elephants kneel, a chair or stepladder is placed against their side, and up we go, one after the other until we are all settled on the mattress. Then as we cling to the ropes that tie the mattress down, the elephant rises first from his front knees and the world around tilts up; the back legs straighten and the world is once again horizontal, and off we go.

Riding in a howdah on elephant back is one of the most uncomfortable sensations I know. The howdah sways and dips like a ship in a choppy sea, and I never have been a good sailor. But riding atop of a mattress strapped on the elephant's back is a very different matter, and a most comfortable method of locomotion. Perched high above the common horde, you swing along, feeling beneath you the huge shoulders working like slow pistons, and childish legs manage to extract a thrill even from the rasping tickle of the bristles on the hide. A wide ditch ahead; unconsciously you tighten your grip on the ropes expecting to be tilted sharply forwards, and as sharply backward as the elephant dips down into the ditch and up again. But in one stride he has crossed it and the angle of the mattress has never altered.

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Which reminds me of an elephant picnic at which one of the female elephants was accompanied by her baby, a delightful little elephant who trotted sturdily along, keeping close beside his mother's flanks. A ditch barred the way, which the adult elephants crossed in a stride. But the baby could not, and stood disconsolately on its brink watching the others on the further side. Back stepped his mother and when she was convinced that her baby really could not cross the ditch she too refused to cross; and not all the blandishments and objurgations of her mahout could induce her to leave her baby behind. So the picnic had to be held on the banks of the ditch, and to show that we harboured no malice against either of them, we fed mother and baby with buns, rock cakes and bananas. On this occasion, however, there was no offspring to be considered, so unperturbed by ditches, we continued towards our destination.

This was known to us by the elegant name of the Pig Village. It lay five or six miles out of Taunggyi, and the road thither wound along the foot of the Crag; overhanging thickets made of the path a cool corridor on the hottest afternoon. The village itself was a typical Taungthu hamlet, dirty, and happy-go-lucky, only made more than ordinarily smelly by the superabundance of swine. Needless to say, we did not stop at the village, but swept magnificently through it, with men staring, women smiling and children waving and screaming. About a mile beyond the village we entered a glade where Titania might have slept,

lulled in these flowers with dances and delight,

so cool it was, so shady. At the end of the glade a jungle stream tumbled in a small waterfall, and then widened and deepened into a pool whose sandy bed was dappled with straying sunbeams, and where the rusty water tempted one to swim.

While we bathed and paddled the servants lighted a fire, set the kettles to boil, and unpacked the picnic baskets. And we ate and drowsed and played games, while the sun-flecked, water-pearled hours slipped past until it was time to go back. Regretfully we scrambled up on to the elephants, and turned home-

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wards; along the narrow forest path where inquisitive branches swished against our legs, and where from an unaccustomed eye-level we watched the startled birds as they prepared to go to bed.

Before the advent of cars our picnic places had, perforce, to be chosen with due regard to our walking or riding capacities. But when cars became more common it was possible to go further afield, and then to the usual excitement was added the further zest of uncertainty. One day we received an invitation to lunch at the Turkish camp at Thammakan, about 30 miles from Taunggyi; feeling very venturesome we hired a car and arranged that it should call at the house at about 8 o'clock in the morning, so as to ensure our arrival in good time for lunch. By 8.30 we were getting agitated, and by 8.45 were contemplating sending a wire to cancel our acceptance, but then the car turned up and we decided to start and hope for the best. We bundled in, waved farewell, and daddy and the houseboys, with resigned expressions, watched us crunch away down the drive and through the gateway. There was a lurch and a crash; the back wheel of the car had gone over the culvert of the narrow bridge outside our gate and we were stuck in the ditch. Up came the servants, school labourers and dogs, and amid shouts and barking the car was heaved out and we made a fresh start, leaving behind expressions of even greater gloom and foreboding.

Through Taunggyi, past Hairpin Bend, down the hill to Sinhe, across the Heho plain. Our spirits soared; we were getting along in fine style. Crash! A slimy patch of road, and we had skidded into a neighbouring paddy field. Fortunately not a very muddy one, and we were extricated fairly easily, and after the driver had done some minor adjustments with string, we set off again. Miraculously we arrived in time for lunch, and with radiator boiling and hissing we drew up triumphantly before our host's tent.

During the war an internment camp for Turkish prisoners had been laid out at Thammakan, the prisoners being employed in extending the railway as far as Heho. Our host was the commandant in charge of the camp, and he and his family lived in

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tents. Drawing-room, dining-room, bedrooms, were all separate tents, and to us children our own house suddenly seemed extremely unoriginal and humdrum.

The lunch, which was cooked and served entirely by prisoners, was excellent, and when it was over we went into the adjacent tent, which was the drawing-room. It was the hottest time of day, and the large green lined tent was delightfully cool. We settled ourselves in the deep armchairs and sofa for coffee and somnolent talk. Suddenly there was a scream from one of the ladies. I looked up from the rug on which I was playing Halma with the commandant's little boy, and over the top of one of the sofa cushions I saw a hooded head rear up. Before I could move the head had disappeared and six foot of white lightning shot past me. It was a king cobra. In a moment everyone was up on sofa or chair, and the cobra, baffled in its attempt to get out of the tent, coiled itself on the rug and reared its head prepared to attack anyone who ventured to approach. Our shouts brought half a dozen prisoners, with sticks and a rope. I have seen snakes tackled with stones, sticks, revolver and shotguns, but never before or since have I seen one hunted as those barefoot Turks did. One of them pursued it with a noosed rope while the rest set upon it with sticks, warding off its lunges. After a short scrimmage it was lassoed; the noose whipped down over the head and tightened round the thickest part of the neck just below the hood, and in a few minutes the strangled cobra lay dead, its coils still jerking. Its mouth gaped wide open, and the sharp curved fangs gleamed white against the crimson jaws, the cruellest looking mouth I have ever seen. The Turks cut off the head, the one who had lassoed it extracted the teeth, and the body, dangling limply over a stick, and shorn now of all its beauty, was carried off to suffer the final indignity of the stewpot.

The excitement over we settled down into a brief somnolence, until it was time to set off on the homeward run. For the past hour the driver had been loitering uneasily around the tent; more string had appeared on the car, and with some misgiving we swallowed an early and hasty cup of tea, draped the rugs

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over our knees and prepared ourselves for the drive back. Our misgivings were justified. We had not gone more than fifteen miles before there was a bang and the rear tyre was flat. Resignedly we sat down on a pile of macadam chips while the driver hitched up his trousers above the knees and squatting down beside the car, proceeded to mend the puncture. Spare wheels and spare tyres had not been thought of in those days. After an hour the driver announced that the tyre was mended and we got back into the car. But it refused to start. The driver cranked and re cranked; he pulled out knobs and pushed them in again; he cranked; we waited in dreary impotence. Then just when we had decided to commandeer an approaching bullock-cart to take us back to Tham-makan for the night, the engine gave a roar and we set off once again. Ten miles on and the front tyre went flat. Once again the unhappy driver hitched up his trousers and started to repair the puncture. We bought sticks of sugar cane from a passing Taungthu woman, and chewed them with a sensation that this might be our last meal before our bleached bones were found beside the car. However the tyre was mended, the engine started up and we went off. Fifteen minutes later the driver announced that he must fill up, and that the tin of petrol was in the back of the car, under us. We could not help feeling that he might have filled up at the last stopping place, but we clambered meekly out, a funnel was produced, the petrol poured in and we climbed back again into the car. (We always climbed, never stepped, into the Taunggyi cars.) But as if the foul fiend himself had possessed it, nothing would induce the car to start. For what seemed hours we sat huddled beneath the rugs while the driver fiddled and cranked and swore Burmese oaths. The sun had long since set; mist and the smoke of village fires lay over the darkening plain; the stars winked and twinkled in obvious amusement at our plight. We had resigned ourselves to a chilly night by the roadside, when the foul fiend got bored and the engine spluttered into life and we crawled off. Incredulously we watched the wavering funnel of light from the headlamps pick out one milestone after another. Heho, past the sleeping dak bungalow at Sinhe; then the three

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mile climb up to Taunggyi. Well, if the worst came to the worst we could walk home now. Tired and cold we gazed ahead, and as in a dream we saw the headlights swing round a bend and fasten on the forms of a leopardess and her cubs playing games on the road. In a flash the cubs had gone; for one moment the leopardess stood with her head turned towards us, and her eyes glowed in the light of the headlamps before she bounded away after her cubs. It was close on midnight before we arrived home.

CHAPTER III

BULLOCK BELLS

THE Shan states are bounded on the north and east by China, Indo-China and Siam and on the south and west by Burma proper. They are a collection of states, ruled over by native chiefs called 'sawbwas'. When Burma was annexed in 1885, the sawbwas voluntarily offered allegiance to Britain. They were left in full authority over their states, provided that they administered their lands 'in accordance with justice, equity and good conscience, and not opposed to the spirit of the law in the rest of British India'. British officials were placed in the states to assist in the administration of justice and generally to act as advisers. At first the states were divided, for political purposes, into the northern and the southern Shan states, but in 1922 they were made into a Federation.

For centuries the sawbwas and their queens (the mahadevi), had lived in their picturesque, but usually dirty and dilapidated, haws, or palaces, and had carried on a tradition of life, and a ceremonial derived primarily from that of the Burmese kings, ultimately from ancient Chinese usage. In 1902, the Government decided that some effort should be made to educate the future chieftains on Western lines, and so a school was opened at Taunggyi, the headquarters of the southern Shan states, for the sons and relations of the Shan chiefs. For sixteen years my father was the principal of this school.

The orthodox three-term school year could not be observed in the Shan chiefs' school, as many of the boys lived such distances from Taunggyi that in those pre-motor days they would have spent their entire holidays in travelling to and from their homes. So the school worked for a nine-month stretch, from April to December, and closed for holidays for the first three months of the year. During those months, my father, whenever possible, used to go on tour through some of the states to interview the parents, and to see for himself the home environment of the

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individual boys. Mother accompanied him, and as soon as we were old enough to stand the travelling we were taken with them.

In January 1917, daddy, mother, Mary and I set off in bullock-carts on a six-week tour. The preparations that had to be made! As far as possible we lived 'on the country', but a certain amount of tinned food had to be taken, milk, butter, biscuits and so on. Camp furniture of all kinds, beds, tables, chairs, bath, cooking pots, crockery, bedding, had to be packed, everything that our civilization has made indispensable for a minimum of comforts; if anything should be forgotten there was no parcel post by which the missing article could be sent after us. Bullock-carts had to be engaged, and the bullocks inspected beforehand, to ensure that we should not be handicapped with sick or senile beasts.

Our itinerary included several states, but our ultimate destination was Meung-Keung, the capital of the state of that name. The sawbwa of Meung-Keung was one of the bigger chiefs, his son was at school in Taunggyi, and the Meung-Keung Pwe was a festival which my parents had long been anxious to see. It was held annually and attracted large numbers of sightseers and traders not only from the surrounding states but also from the Chinese frontiers.

So one chilly morning, my younger sister and our governess waved good-bye from the veranda, as four bullock-carts turned out of our gate and started slowly along the Hopon road. Mother and I were in one cart, daddy and Mary in another, the servants in the remaining two, and our luggage equally distributed between all four.

A flat bottomed cart with two wooden wheels screaming round a wooden axle, a central shaft terminating in a cross beam to which are yoked the necks of two bullocks. That is the Burmese bullock-cart. The driver sits on the central shaft, between the rumps of the animals, so that he can poke their ribs, or twist their tails with the least possible bodily exertion to himself. The art of driving a bullock-cart is a simple one. All that is necessary to start the animals is to emit a kind of retching grunt, twist the bullocks' tails, and prod them in the ribs, either with a

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heel or with a switch. The same rules hold good for stopping them, and the intervening period is best employed by smoking a cheroot or going to sleep. If the bullocks run away they won't run so far or so fast; if the wheels get stuck in a rut you wake up and extricate them; if the bullocks decide to stop and go to sleep, well, to-morrow lies ahead and is as good as to-day.

The cart is usually covered with a circular mat awning, and a bamboo rack, first cousin to a hen coop, is attached behind, in which the animals' fodder is carried. This hen coop is the cause of the unvaryingly close formation of a bullock caravan. At the start of a day's journey the leading cart creaks away, to be followed in a few minutes by the next and the next. Perhaps twenty-five or thirty yards separate one from the other. But gradually each cart moves up on to the preceding one, until all that separates one cart from the next is a pair of long black tongues pulling wisps of straw out of the rack immediately ahead. The leading bullocks are unlucky.

Springs are non-existent, and the only way to ensure a modicum of comfort is to line the carts plentifully with straw, and upon that place a thick mattress. Luggage is piled up at the end of the cart, forming a back rest to lean against during the day, except when a steep hill brings all the boxes sliding down in an avalanche upon one. A cloth hung at the front opening can be drawn across to shade the eyes from glare, and to keep away the sight, if not the smell of driver and bullocks.

For the first day or two the jolting of the cart and the perpetual scream of the unoiled wheels seem unbearable, and on waking up the second morning you feel as if every bone in the body has been racked and racked again. But unbelievably soon you get accustomed to it; you accept the jarring, and the smell of the bullocks, and your impatience at the slow progress gives place to a deep content with the unhurrying passage of the hours and the route. In a kind of waking dream you watch the countryside creep towards you, and as slowly recede into the distance. And when cramp clutches you, you prod the somnolent charioteer in the back, and, waking with a jerk, he seizes the bullocks' tails

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and adjures them to stop. Placing one hand on the wheel, and another on the bullock's rump, a slithering leap lands you on the ground, and you proceed to walk off your stiffness. So the day slips by until you come to the halting-place.

I suppose that time has dimmed the memory of the bumps and the numerous discomforts that are an inevitable accompaniment to bullock-cart travel. I have only pleasant visions and nostalgic recollections of an existence where hurry was unknown because speed was impossible. Across the background of memory the bullock-carts move with hieratic solemnity and deliberate procession, and the music of the bullock bells and the scream of thirsty axles still carry faintly across the years. The Burmese bullock bells are big and heavy; they are often twelve inches high or more, and instead of hanging beneath the animals' throat, they are placed upright on top of the neck. With every step they sway solemnly in their wooden frames, and the musical note 'tlonk-tlonk' comes rocking on the air long after a caravan has disappeared among the trees.

The sawbwa of every state through which we passed lent us an 'ahmudan' or retainer, who acted as guide, interpreter and ambulatory passport, and ensured that no 'let or hindrance' interfered with our passage. One of his chief duties was to arrange that, every day, a messenger should be sent ahead to the next halting-place, to warn the 'heng' or headman of the village of our arrival. So, at whatever time of day or night we might arrive, the resthouse was standing ready, clean by the standards of the village if not by ours, and supplied with wood, water and fodder. The carts squeaked to a standstill, the bullocks' heads were withdrawn from the yoke-pins, luggage was carried into the resthouse, and in a very short space of time mats were spread, the camp furniture was opened, mosquito nets put up, and, in the kitchen, bath water was bubbling, while the cook prepared curry for supper. Meanwhile the whole village had settled down round the resthouse to watch our antics; murmurs of admiration went up as the last refractory strap of the Roorkhi chair slipped into place; necks were craned to see what alien novelty was being

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produced from food-box or suit-case; comments on our personal appearance and habits were tossed to and fro. But gradually our audience melted away, and we were left to eat and read and pass the hours until the bat-winged night and tired limbs sent us sound sleep on our narrow, creaking camp-beds.

Early the next morning, as soon as it was light enough to see, the whole place stirred into activity; camp-beds were folded, bedding rolled up and stowed away in canvas bags; breakfast came with hot coffee and a precautionary dose of quinine, and our caravan set off on another day's journey.

The resthouses at which we halted varied greatly. On the main roads, and in some of the bigger villages we found dak bungalows, built and maintained by the Government for the use of officials on tour. Sometimes these were furnished with beds, tables, chairs and oil-lamps. But off the beaten track we camped in 'zayats', native resthouses, usually built by some pious Burman, as a work of charity, and made of wood, or matting, with thatched roofs, and floors of split bamboo. Very often the building consisted of one large room, which could be divided into compartments by curtains or mats, hung from the roof-poles. These curtains, sometimes lent by the sawbwa for our convenience, and sometimes produced by the headman of the village, were often most charming and effective. On some, a kind of applique work had been used in which figures were cut out of different coloured cloths, and sewn on to a background of neutral colour. Others were embroidered in gold and silver thread, with scenes of war, or hunting, with folk-tales, or with grotesque figures of men, birds and animals. At night, in the uncertain light of candles, these figures seemed to come alive, and to peer myopically at us out of the gloom, while never ceasing their endless procession across the curtains.

The first night out from Taunggyi we slept at Hopon, the capital of a small state of the same name. The road wound along endless valleys and round low hills, and on every side bamboo groves and paddy fields afforded a monotonous vista. The following day we halted at Nam-San, a small village, but famous

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in those parts for its vast caves. The limestone rocks around the village are honeycombed with them. Villagers with flaming pinewood torches led us through some of these caves, in which stalactites and stalagmites dripped and sprang into pillars and bosses, grey, lonely temples where alabaster Buddhas brooded in an endless silence. Deep, deep below the ground in those shadowless and lightless caverns, the Enlightened One keeps watch. The devotion of his followers has placed there a thousand effigies of their Lord, and the tradition and historic memory of over two thousand years have immobilized the living energy of Prince Gautama into attitudes which are now immortal and unchangeable. Sitting, cross-legged, with downcast eyes, as when on earth he meditated beneath the pipal tree; reclining, on one elbow, as when he lay at the point of death; standing, with fingers raised in teaching rather than in blessing. A bunch of withered flowers, a discoloured lump of candle-grease, a handful of grain or a few 'pice' laid in the upturned palm bear mute witness alike to the poverty and piety of his worshippers. Neikban itself, the place of perfect peace, could not hold more quiet than lies upon these temples.

The caves lead one out of the other in endless galleries. The first into which we went was eerie enough; our voices echoed from the walls and rang against the vaults, dislodging hosts of bats which hung like limp pennons from the stalactites and sending them fluttering through the tossing torchlight. But even bats would have been welcome, as we penetrated deeper into the caves, and felt all living things receding further and further, until the very air was dead, and the torches began to sink. It left an unforgettable impression on my childish mind, the utter desolation of those midnight caves, so remote from sunlight and green things, as lonely and as cold as interstellar space.

A broad, swift stream flows through Mongpaw, the next stopping-place on our journey. Here the sawbwa of the state received us, and when we called on him in his haw, he showed us a dah which had been given to him by King Mindon Min, whose son Theebaw had been the last Burmese king. It was a

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truly princely gift. Both the sheath and handle were of gold, decorated with fine chains of gold, and embossed with knobs, each of which was studded with a large ruby *en cabochon*. Less rich, but none the less welcome, were the presents of potatoes, sugar cane, oranges and pomeloes which the Mongpawm sawbwa sent to our resthouse that evening, together with the inevitable chicken, whose squawks of protest heralded the messenger from the haw.

We creaked away from Mongpawm through the damp mist which rose nightly from the river, too early for anyone to be abroad. Here and there a light from a house blinked drowsily at us, and then we passed on and the eye closed as the house sank back to sleep again beneath its misty quilt. The rising sun dispersed the mist, and we continued to creak along in an atmosphere resembling a steam laundry. That afternoon we halted in a valley, through which a river, perhaps the Mongpawm river, wound its bright curves. On one side the jungle came crowding to the water's edge, and on the other bank marsh and meadowland gave place to yellow sand, sparkling with mica. In the evening Mary and I went down to the river, and on the ochre sand we saw fresh pug-marks of tiger or leopard, and, a few feet away, some faint scratches where a porcupine's quills had brushed the ground as he drank. That night I lay awake for a few minutes, listening to the music of the bamboos and the distant song of the hurrying river, and wondered what creatures were crowding to the yellow sand-spit to drink. We did not have time to find out next morning, as we were up and away as soon as it was light.

The following day we came to Kawknai, where the resthouse stood high on a hillside among pine trees. A lovelier place of refreshment to the senses can scarcely be imagined. Through the windows the eye rested upon the pine-shawled shoulders of the surrounding hills, and night and day the pines sang to us and breathed upon us their balm. A paradise, except for the vultures who in large numbers had taken up their abode in two pine trees which grew in the resthouse compound. They sat in rows on the branches, stretching their naked necks in a sardonic boredom,

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and occasionally leaving their perches with an ungainly lurch, which turned, incredibly, to a beautiful soaring flight as they drifted in circles against the drifting sky.

Ten miles beyond Kawknai we came to Loilem, the political headquarters of that district. It lay at the foot of the hills where Kawknai stood on tiptoe, and the bullock-carts clattered down the winding macadam road and white clouds of dust ballooned behind us. At Loilem we were most hospitably welcomed by the political officer and his wife. I have the most vivid recollections both of Mrs. Kingsley's wonderful cookery, and of their little house standing among roses, jasmine and cannas, and looking across a valley to the little pine-shaded reservoir.

A few days after leaving Loilem we came to Nawng-Leng, where the ground was hard and hot with outcrops of iron. The ore is dug from deep, narrow shafts in the hillsides and is brought in baskets to the small smithies in the village and its outlying hamlets. The furnaces used are of the simplest, built of mud, with two openings one above the other. In the lower a charcoal fire burns, and the ore is dropped, a handful at a time, into the upper opening. A pair of bamboo bellows supplies the necessary blast, and a metal of very pure quality is obtained, from which knives, traps, tools, arrowheads and hoes are manufactured for local use. Muted by distance, the roar of the blast formed a background to the usual medley of village sounds, which drifted to us in our zayat set apart from the other houses.

This zayat was the usual native hut, raised on piles, with mat walls, thatched roof and split-bamboo floor, and it looked clean and comfortable. While we were unpacking I noticed a peculiar sound which came from somewhere inside the house, but which I could not instantly locate. All through the bustle of unpacking, I was conscious of this hissing, rustling murmur. Eventually we discovered whence it came, from the jaws of millions of white ants all steadily engaged in eating up the zayat. The posts, ceiling, floor and walls were alive with them, all munching away, literally for dear life. I remember feeling very 'itchy' as I went to bed, and we all wondered whether the zayat would choose

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that night to fall about our ears. It did not, but a few weeks later, when the superintendent visited Nawng-Leng, he found, where the resthouse had been, a heap of ruins.

The day after leaving Nawng-Leng we encountered the first serious mishap of our journey. Mother sprained her ankle. Tired of riding in the bullock-cart she had told the driver to stop, and as she scrambled down, the bullocks jerked the cart forward and she landed with her foot twisted under her. In a few minutes it was so swollen that she could hardly pull off her shoe. Fortunately we were close to a stream and she bathed the foot immediately, and for the rest of the day she sat in the cart and applied wet compresses to the swelling. The next day she could not put her foot to the ground, and so we halted at Pang-Lon to give it a chance to recover. The zayat where we stayed looked like a beautiful stage-set; near by a glinting stream flowed, behind the thatched roof purple shadows fell athwart a group of white pagodas, and minas twittered in the branches of two large banyan trees standing between the zayat and the road. We opened our camp chairs in the shade of these trees, and for all save the hottest hours of the day, we sat there, watching the people who passed to and fro, and who stopped to stare at the unfamiliar rite of applying cold compresses to a swollen ankle. The air we breathed blew from the hills, and these Shan people we watched walked with the gait of hill people. The men strode past, their large grass hats perched atop their turbans, and the seats of their baggy trousers flapping around their ankles. Each one carried, slung over the shoulder by a tasselled cord, the long-handled knife or dah, which they used for chopping wood, to cut up food, and for defence against man and beast. The women showed their interest more openly than the men, and the babies, tied on their mother's back, or pattering alongside them, with bowl or tray balanced on their head, peeped at us fearfully. The little girls were replicas of their mothers, with bright skirts wrapped tightly round them, loose jackets and large grass hats. Men and women alike carried, over one shoulder, the characteristic Shan bag, some of dingy, unbleached cotton, some gaily red and green,

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embroidered with silver thread, or with the shiny white seeds known as 'Job's Tears'.

Pang-Lon zayat had one drawback—a snake had taken up its abode in the 'outside sanitation'.

After two days mother's foot was better, and we continued our journey, but for some time she was a prisoner in the bullock-cart, and most irksome she found it.

We then came to Laikha, the capital of the state of that name, and one of the most prosperous of the southern Shan states. On either side of the Nam Teng river, which flows placidly through the state, the land swells away in a series of undulations. The Shan and Taungthu population lead a tranquil existence, cultivating paddy, and the terraced fields lap the hilly horizon in gleaming, green-speared stretches.

About three miles out of the town we saw an imposing concourse awaiting our approach in the shade of a banyan tree. As we drew nearer we distinguished, in the midst of outriders and attendants, an ancient and very dilapidated Victoria. The sawbwa of Laikha had sent his son and this ceremonious equipage to escort us into the town. The prince greeted us, and an attendant came forward with a silver bowl full of water. This act of courtesy is no empty gesture in the East, where a cup of cold water is the most welcome hospitality that can be proffered to a dusty traveller. Thirsty as we were, typhoid and dysentery are realities, so we merely put the bowl to our lips in a polite pretence at drinking, then we climbed into the carriage, two baggy-trouserred 'footmen' clung on behind, the son spurred his horse on ahead, and with ceremonial umbrellas held over us we made our entry into Laikha.

We stayed three days in Laikha; we had been travelling steadily for several days and the bullocks were tired. The rest-house was a teak building on the outskirts of the town and on the bank of a small river where the women of Laikha drew water and washed their clothes. The caretaker was a desiccated little Shan with a wall eye, a large grin, and an even larger collection of hens, which overran the compound, clucking and

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fighting for treasure trove. One afternoon we were resting, and the whole world seemed sunk in noonday slumber, when suddenly the peace was shattered by a frenzied clamour from one corner of the compound. Our bullock-carts had been drawn up there, and in the welcome shade which they provided all the hens had congregated to doze away the hot hours. A snake, coming in hopeful search of eggs and young chicks, slid among the sleepy, respectable ranks, and in a moment the ground under the carts was a maelstrom of agitated hen; feathers were flying, skinny legs thrashing, and in the midst were the slipping, glancing coils. We saw the snake when it had been killed; it was about five feet long with brown back, reddish yellow belly, and two little blunt horns on its head. Whether it was a deadly variety or not we could not say, but it certainly looked it, and we refrained from eating any of the corpses beneath the bullock-carts.

Laikha was the centre of a thriving lacquer industry. Lacquer bowls, trays and boxes are used in every household throughout Burma and the Shan states, but certain districts are renowned for the making of lacquer articles. Pagan, in Central Burma, produces the finest lacquer ware, and visitors to Wembley may remember the exquisite lacquer exhibits there; bowls and cups, cylindrical boxes with trays fitting one inside the other, in lovely reds, greens and yellows, so pliable that the opposite sides of a cup could be squeezed together till they met, and when they sprang back into position again the lacquer was neither cracked nor dented.

Laikha lacquer was inferior to Pagan lacquer; it was not as supple and the designs lacked the purity and precision of the Pagan ware. But it had its own charm of vigour and boldness, and it had one characteristic which I never saw in the lacquer work of any other district. In most Burma lacquer work the surface is smooth, whereas in much of the Laikha work the design is in relief.

In the evenings we wandered round the town, talking to the people and watching the lacquer workers at their trade. First we saw the women making the framework of the articles, plaiting

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thin strips of bamboo closely and neatly together. A mixture of cow dung and paddy husk was then rubbed into the interstices, and the whole covered with a thick black varnish of wood oil (thit-si), after which it was put out for several days to dry in the sun. The pattern was then engraved with a sharp pointed pen on to the black varnish, and next began the long process of applying the colours. Apart from the black background, red, yellow and green were the only colours used; the vermilion came from China, orpiment gave the yellow, and indigo was added to the orpiment to make the green. Varnish made from the oil of the lacquer tree was added to each colour in order to make it adhere and set as soon as possible. The making of lacquer is a slow and patient process — or rather series of processes. A layer of one colour is painted over the pattern, and then the article is placed in a primitive lathe to rub off the colour wherever it is not required on the pattern. As each layer of colour dries it is polished with lac and sand, and rubbed with oil applied with the palm. All these processes occupy several months, for each layer of colour must be thoroughly hardened and dried before the next one can be applied. Some of the colours used are so delicate that, if exposed to the sun before they have dried, they fade very rapidly, and so the articles have to be placed in underground chambers to harden. When a design in relief is required, the final stage is to shape the surface colour while still wet into a bold upstanding pattern of scrolls and foliage.

The people were friendly and curious. At first the children were scared, and ran away screaming, but after they had become accustomed to seeing us they would follow us around in batches, to begin with at a respectful and apprehensive distance, but gradually closing in round us and touching us to see if our white skins were real or merely 'put on'. Mary and I were the chief exhibits. The periodic visits of political officers had accustomed them to the sight of white man; white woman was rarer, but white child was a new phenomenon. Our dresses occasioned the deepest curiosity, and everyone, children and adults alike, was consumed with desire to find out what we wore underneath them.

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At length a bolder woman than the rest darted forward and hastily flicked up my dress, and at the sight of my frilly petticoat and knickers, a scream of ecstasy went up from the mob; men and women clapped their hands and went into gales of laughter, while the children rolled on the ground in wild delight.

When we left Laikha we were escorted out of the town by a retinue of the sawbwa's bodyguard, most of whom bore a striking resemblance to Alice's White Knight, so hung about were they with spears, be-tasselled dahs, gourds, bamboo baskets, and bobbles all over the horses' harness. Some of them even carried a little pillow for use, presumably, when they 'off-saddled' for an hour's rest. These were of the Chinese pattern, hard as granite, covered with bright pink and red silk, and decorated with coloured seeds, cowrie shells, spangles and glass beads. In contrast, and with less decorative effect, one warrior carried, dangling from his saddle, an enamel 'jerry'.

A few days after leaving Laikha our guide told us that a long stretch lay before us on the following day, and that if we were to save the bullocks from travelling through the hottest hours, we should have to set off at two or three o'clock in the morning. So we decided that, instead of sleeping in the zayat, we should sleep in the bullock-carts. After supper that night, everything was packed up and stowed away, and we crawled in between the sheets and rugs in the carts, I for one very pleased at this novel bedroom. The last things I remember seeing before I fell asleep were my shoes which I had tied by their laces to the bamboo hood over us. At two o'clock in the morning I was jerked out of sleep as the bullocks were yoked to the cart, and as we turned out of the zayat compound my dangling shoes set up a jiggling dance which stopped only when the bullocks halted. There were many leopards along that particular stretch of road, and the sawbwa of Laikha had provided us with an extra escort who carried torches to scare away any hungry beasts. I lay between sleeping and waking, listening to the squeak of the axles, the creak of the carts, and the rustle of straw behind me as the following bullocks explored the contents of our 'hen-coop'. On either side of us, the torches

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bobbed up and down in the darkness, and I caught an occasional glimpse of a shadowy face in the flickering glow. I slept and woke and slept again, until a faint grey light lifted above the tree tops, and presently sunrise dimmed the torches. We had a wayside breakfast of coffee, chocolate and cabin biscuits, while hoopoes and minas flashed and chattered overhead. The rest of that day was long and hot, and when at last we arrived at the halting place we were all very weary. Directly the yokes were lifted from the bullocks' necks, they lay down, too tired at first even to nibble at the food which the carters put before them.

A few days later we saw in the throbbing haze of a plain below us the roofs and pagodas of Meung-Keung.

For days past all the roads for miles around had led to Meung-Keung. The pwe (festival) was due to begin the day after our arrival, and as we approached the town the crowds grew thicker. They came on horseback, on mules, in bullock-carts, but the majority of them were walking, trudging along the rutted roads. Many had come from very distant villages. Scores of mule caravans overtook us, driven by Chinese muleteers, with enormous pyramidal straw hats and ragged indigo clothing. I saw one muleteer with that rarest of survivals, a pigtail, the old symbol of servitude which I believe is now almost extinct. They might have walked straight out of the age of Kublai Khan, so wild and fierce and primitive they looked. In only one respect did they differ very materially from the caravans of thirteenth century China, and that was in the weapons they carried. The muleteers with whom Marco Polo penetrated to the borders of Burma would have been armed with knives and with the terrible Tartar bow; the muleteers we saw had their knives, but Dane guns and flintlocks had taken the place of bows. Not that bows are unknown in the Shan states in this century. Many of the hill tribes still carry bows and arrows, some of them longbows, and some crossbows, but most of them are made of bamboo, possessing little power when compared with the reflexed Tartar bow, so much more deadly than even the English longbow.

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On arriving at the outskirts of Meung-Keung we were met by the 'Prime Minister' of the state. After the customary offering of a bowl of water, he proffered his lord's apologies for his absence and his son's. The sawbwa, we were told, had been dangerously ill with dysentery, and it was considered advisable to keep the prince close at hand. We duly arrived at Meung-Keung, and were led to the village school, which had been put at our disposal, since every zayat in the place was full. The prime minister escorted us into the school, a bamboo building raised on piles, and then seeing some dust and wisps of straw lying about he whipped off his turban and swept the floor with it. Then without bothering so much as to shake the dust out of the turban, he recoiled it round the ministerial top-knot of oily black hair, and grinning cheerfully, bustled away, regardless of the straws which ringed his head like an airy *chevaux-de-frise*.

Later in the evening we paid our ceremonial visit to the haw, and were received by the sawbwa, his son and the mahadevi. The sawbwa looked desperately ill, and could hardly walk or talk, so we were entertained by his son and wives. Cups of Shan tea, and Marie biscuits were handed round; the latter were very ancient and very dry, and we had not then drunk enough Shan tea to have become accustomed to its peculiar flavour, so we found it unpalatable. Shan tea is not unlike China tea, but it has a more 'greenish' flavour. It is grown on the slopes of the Shan hills, is gathered and dried in the sun and sent all over the Shan country and into Burma. The tea that is exported to Burma undergoes a different process from that which is sold for Shan consumption. The Burmese let-pet, or pickled tea, is dried in the sun, then steamed, after which it is allowed to ferment, and before it is drunk, salt, garlic, oil and millet is added to it. The tea which is drunk by the Shans is merely dried in the sun, collected and stored in baskets. The traditional Shan method of drinking it is to add salt to it after it has been infused, but in many places this method is being supplanted by the European fashion, and such liberal quantities of milk and sugar are added to the tea that it becomes a nauseating syrup.

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The wives were Shan and Taungthu women. Some of the latter were dressed in their traditional tribal costume, but the majority of them had adopted the Burmese dress. The silk tameins swathed in a provocative tightness over the hips were in delicate shades of pink and green with intricately woven patterns. Heavy cigarette-shaped earrings pierced the lobes of their ears, pulling them down with their weight, and bracelets and chains adorned their wrists and neck. They chattered to mother asking her questions about us and her other children, and when they learnt that she had a son far away in England, whom she had not seen for six years they clapped their palms gently together with little cries of pity. In turn, mother inquired after their children, some of whom were much in evidence, crawling over the bamboo floor. They were solemn mites, with bellies distended from a too-starchy rice diet, and they sucked, with apparently equal enjoyment and equal nonchalance, from their mothers' breasts and long cheroots.

During the entire visit, attendants knelt behind the sawbwa and each of his wives, holding their betel-nut boxes, and ready at a signal to hand them a betel-nut ready prepared for chewing. Betel is the Burmese equivalent for chewing gum. It is the nut of the areca palm, and a common sight both in Burma and the Shan states are the groves of the areca palm, with vines twining around bamboo posts. To make the chewing quid, the nut is wrapped up in the vine leaf together with lime and cardamon. Rich and poor alike chew and spit, chew and spit; the floor of every house, humble and prosperous, is a spittoon, discoloured with patches of red betel-nut juice. And not only floors, but teeth as well are rapidly discoloured; to Europeans the sight of black and decaying teeth in a vermilion-slobbered mouth is most distasteful, but apparently the chewers think that it is worth it.

This unattractive custom has had one good result, and that is the manufacture of betel-nut boxes. Anyone who chews betel, and, in Burma, that is everyone, carries his betel-nut box, and these boxes are so charming that they reconcile one to the habit of chewing. Some are made of lacquer; the cylindrical boxes, with separate tray compartments fitting one into another are unique

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to Burma; they usually have three compartments, in which the leaves, the nuts, and the lime and cardamon are kept separately. Frequently the boxes are of silver, some oval shaped, two or three inches long, some round, some rectangular. All of them display the characteristically flowing Burmese designs of scrolls and tendrils and are executed with that skill in silver work in which the Burman, and the Shan still more so, is pre-eminent. Rich folk, chieftains and their wives, have gold betel-nut boxes in various shapes, chased and ornamented like the silver ware, many of them of the deep red gold, obtained by boiling the seeds of the tamarind tree with the metal. Every personage of any rank and importance has, in continual attendance upon him, a page or maidservant, whose sole purpose is to carry the betel box, and prepare the quid for chewing.

The day after our arrival we went down to the fairground which lay a mile or so outside the town. In an open space dotted here and there by silk cotton trees and banyans, a mushroom growth of booths and bamboo shelters had sprung up, from which rose clouds of dust and an indescribable clamour. Crowds of people surged backwards and forwards between the stalls; everyone was jostling and being jostled, and the greatest good humour and a holiday spirit pervaded the whole place. At first our passage rather resembled a royal progress; as usual, the appearance of a white woman with white children roused excitement to fever pitch, and crowds gathered round and followed in our footsteps. Comments on our behaviour and our looks were tossed to and fro. When our attention was caught by something in a stall, and we stopped to bargain, the crowd pressed closer and closer and listened entranced to our efforts at haggling. Amid the diversity of hill dialects that were spoken there, mother's Burmese was of little use, and so our language had to consist of smiles, nods, gestures of horror, violent shakes of the head, and a monotonous repetition of the price we considered reasonable. When at last a bargain had been struck, the crowd quivered with delight, and when the money was handed over in exchange for the article

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everyone shook with delirious merriment, we could only suppose at the farcical price which we had paid.

Many of the things which we bought at Meung-Keung are still in my possession, and I have but to handle them to be transported on a wave of nostalgia, to that little town remote among the Shan hills. An olive green vase is all that remains of many pieces of pottery which we bought there, and with which the passage of time and many 'removals' have dealt harshly. There were pots and cups and bowls of all shapes and sizes, most of them bold and free of line, and all of them possessing the simplicity and good taste, that harmonious balance of use and beauty which seems to be a God-given gift to an unspoiled peasantry. One stall, I remember, sold little figures of this olive green pottery, looking as if they had walked straight out of some friendly Shan ark. A rather ruffled cock, a sleepy cat, a bird with dropsical legs, a confidential elephant, a very 'square' deer, and a pig whose like was never yet on land or sea; all full of life, slightly grotesque and wholly delightful. The distinctive green glaze of this Meung-Keung pottery is obtained by pounding up sulphate of copper, and mixing it with clay, and water in which rice has been boiled, and finally firing the pots in a kiln.

From another stall mother bought some lengths of silk of which I still keep a few scraps for sentiment's sake, but most of which have passed into the oblivion of worn-out dresses. They were long in passing, for Shan and Burmese silks are durable as well as beautiful. They have not the suaveness, the smooth sophistication of Chinese and Japanese silk, but they have clearer hues and more arresting combinations of design and colour.

At the same stall we bought some of the shoulder bags which I have mentioned before as being carried by nearly every Shan. They are made from a length of material folded upon itself and the sides stitched together to form a deep narrow bag; a strip of the same material forms the strap by which the bag is slung over the shoulder. This shape of bag is found all over the states; in its simplest form it is made of unbleached cotton, but though the shape never varies you seldom find two bags alike in design, colour

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or decoration. Red, blue, green, and black, or gold of silver thread; striped, with zig-zags, squares or dog-teeth; tasselled or fringed; embroidered with beads, or porcupine quills, with white seeds or with shells; practical to use and a perpetual pleasure to the eye.

I wonder whether the advance of Western civilization has changed the whole character of that fairground? When we wandered round, we saw dirt in plenty, disease and poverty. But we saw little that was tawdry or vulgar. The hideous enamel and cheap china ware which now disfigures every Indian and African market had not then found its way to Meung-Keung; the people still used gourds instead of galvanized iron buckets, and instead of tins of cheap salmon and sardines there were trays of scarlet peppers, turmeric and cardamons, baskets of rice, peanuts, pumpkins, and oranges, and faggots of sugar cane. Crying their wares through the fairground, sweetmeat sellers, haloed with flies, balanced their trays on their head. Such sweets! Brown lumps of juggery, pop-corn balls of maize and juggery; curd cakes, and yard-square sheets of peanut toffee.

Before the silversmiths' booths I think we lingered longest of all. The Shan is a skilled craftsman in all kinds of silverwork. The heavily embossed bowls and boxes, ornamented with scrolls, tendrils, and the traditional figures of queens and kings, demons and griffins, are, perhaps, the most delightful and characteristic products of Shan and Burmese art, full of vigour and vitality. The figures that chase each other endlessly round the bowls are as fluid as water, instinct with life; we see the unfinished gesture, poised flight. The gold and silver jewellery does not usually show the same high quality, though I have seen some which ranks with the best Italian filigree. A man's wealth in the Shan states is usually carried on his wife. The women go bravely adorned with silver chains and plaques, bracelets and anklets, earrings and hairpins. I treasure a pair of earrings which came from a silversmith at Meung-Keung. They are roughly pear-shaped, and are built up of many tiny hollow prisms, beaten out and welded together. Upon every projecting facet of the prisms a minute decoration,

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has been soldered, a little chain, a couple of tiny balls, a minute ammonite — a gesture of fun in silver!

Though the Meung-Keung festival was primarily a trading concern, it was evident that many of the people there were combining piety with business. The pagodas, whose spires we had seen as we approached the town, lay to one side of the fairground, and from the surging crowds of merchants and holiday makers, a steady stream flowed towards the pagodas. The Buddhist does not keep his religion in a watertight compartment, and it was a perfectly natural part of the day's work and play, to visit the pagodas, and do obeisance before the Lord Buddha.

We found ourselves at the foot of a slope, on which a few shallow steps mounted to a natural terrace. Here the pagodas clustered, big and small, some crumbling to ruin, some with the building scaffolds not yet removed, all with the very slender spire which distinguishes a Shan pagoda from a Burmese one. The terrace was crowded with all the appurtenances of a holy place which has given itself over for the time being to holiday making. Running in rows from one edge of the terrace to the other were small stalls, each with its attendant squatting beneath the shade of an umbrella whose bamboo handle was stuck into the ground. In the trays and baskets which constituted the stall, were displayed for sale every kind of object suitable for a pagoda offering. Candles, small pottery lamps, like one's childhood conception of Aladdin's lamp, heaps of rice and juggery, bunches of frangipani and 'neem', i.e. Burmese lilac, thin bamboo sticks to which flower heads had been fastened, some real, others of paper or tinsel. Though not particularly attractive to European eyes, these flowered sticks are always a favourite offering, and bundles of them, stuck stiffly into earthenware vases are to be seen in every pagoda.

Beyond the stalls, 'tagondaings' or prayer-posts rose into the air, with their paper streamers billowing on the breeze. Here and there a low whitewashed masonry altar was covered with scraps of food, as offerings to the nats (spirits) of the place. Slung from wooden frames were numerous gongs and bells. The latter were cast in heavy metal, and had no tongues, and instead were sounded

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by being struck on the rim by a padded hammer. The gongs were either round with a central pointed 'hub', or else triangular, the former being struck on the hub, the latter on one of the lower points. To strike a bell or a gong is equivalent to uttering a prayer, and few who passed by failed to lift the hammer and send a prayer travelling on diminishing waves of sound over the crowd to the feet of the Lord Buddha; deep booming misereres from the bells, golden vibrating laudates from the gongs.

A sea of humanity flowed up the steps, over the terrace and lapped at the feet of the Buddhas inside the pagodas. Shans and Palaungs, Chinese, Taungthus, Burmans. Naked children cried and laughed and sucked sticks of sugar cane. Crippled folk and blind knelt before the flickering candles. Pariah dogs snapped and fought for scraps. Nuns, drab pathetic little figures with shaven heads and grey habits, crept meekly about, or knelt in endless repetition of their beads. Rich women in all the pride of silks, jewels and flowers bought offerings for the Buddhas, side by side with shabby, sturdy hill women. And everywhere, crouching on the steps, begging at the stalls, dreadful to look at, with running sores and blanched skin, their faces, sightless and featureless, piteously upturned, lepers stretched out fingerless hands and handless wrists, begging for bread.

Over all, rose the white and tapering pagodas, with the sunlight spilling down their sides. And high above, birds balanced and dipped and rose, and from the burnished mitre on the pagoda top the silver tinkle of the pagoda bells fell, sweet and clear, like liquid light.

Daddy's original intention had been to stay a few days in Meung-Keung, and then go on to Hsipaw, returning to Taunggyi by the Hsipaw-Kalaw railway. Our bullock-carts had been hired only as far as Meung-Keung, and so he requested the sawbwa to procure us mules to take us on to Hsipaw. The sawbwa was all willingness; let us but name the day and the mules would be there. Accordingly we arranged to leave Meung-Keung in three days' time. The day before our intended departure, our friend the

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prime minister appeared, and told us that there had been some hitch in the arrangements, but that the mules would be available a day later. By this time we had seen enough of Meung-Keung and the fair, but since there was no help for it we had to acquiesce in the new arrangements. The prime minister assured us that the mules would be before the schoolhouse at the crack of dawn and departed to the accompaniment of a salvo of expectorated betel juice.

We were up early on the morning of our departure, mosquito nets were taken down, camp furniture folded up, stores and equipment packed, and we sat nibbling cabin biscuits and chocolate, and shivering slightly in the chilly morning air. But no mules appeared. At length daddy sent a message to the sawbwa asking him to expedite matters. In half an hour the sawbwa's son appeared, looking very frightened, and apologetically told us that the muleteers were enjoying the festival so much that they refused to leave Meung-Keung. The sawbwa was very sorry, and was making new arrangements, and we should be able, for certain, to leave in a few days' time.

We were very annoyed, but there was nothing to be done but resign ourselves to wait a little longer. We were beginning to feel pessimistic about the prospect of getting to Hsipaw, and were certainly not going to unpack all our gear a third time. So the evening before we were due to leave we walked round to the haw to find out whether the mules would really be ready on the following morning. Our fears were justified. With much shaking of head and clicking of tongue the sawbwa told us that he had not been able to procure the mules. It was the festival. But if we waited another two — or perhaps three days — then he was quite sure that he could get us some mules. But we had had enough of Meung-Keung, and our faith in princes had been badly shaken. Daddy and mother decided to give up the Hsipaw project and return to Taunggyi by the same way as we had come. Our bullock drivers were only too glad to be hired again, so the following morning saw the carts creep one by one out of the school compound, and by the time we had reached the outskirts of

BULLOCK BELLS

Meung-Keung, the caravan had closed up, and we were hearing the familiar rustle of black tongues exploring the straw filled racks.

Our journey homewards was leisurely and uneventful. When we arrived at Loilem, Mr. Kingsley told my parents that a young political officer had shot himself in Hsipaw resthouse a few days previously. If those mules had been forthcoming . . . if we had pestered the Meung-Keung sawbwa more instantly . . . if, if, if . . . we might have arrived at Hsipaw in time to dispel a man's despondency and loneliness and a bullet might not have been fired. Mary and I were not told of this at the time, and so we never knew the keen regrets that marred for my father and mother the pleasant memories of our tour to Meung-Keung.

It is one of God's great mercies that happy memories are among the few things that Time cannot violate. If they are folded deep enough in the heart no icy finger laid, in after years, upon their resting place, can blight them. They remain evergreen. So it is that my memories of the road to Meung-Keung cannot be spoilt by anything that has happened there afterwards; they remain apart, hidden but not obliterated. We little thought, as we journeyed along the pleasant dusty road that, twenty-five years later, Japanese troops would pour along it, thrusting towards Lashio. They did not dally at Meung-Keung and then turn back, but they swept on past its fairground and its white pagodas.

CHAPTER IV
TAUNGGYI

I

OUR house stood back from the road and was separated from it by a field, a stream, and a little straggling copse. But from our nursery windows we could see the road and watch everything that passed. There were always bullock-carts crawling along, and the scream of their axles could be heard, though muted, through the open windows. Sometimes two or three elephants would sway past, or a mule caravan coming from Kengtung, perhaps further still from Tongking or Honan. Or a distant squealing of bagpipes told us that the Gurkhas in the military police barracks beyond the school were starting off on a route march, and in a few minutes we would see them swinging along, stocky little men each with his kukri in his belt. Their wives were seen, daily, coming and going between the barracks and the bazaar; their orange, scarlet and magenta dresses stood out brilliantly among the black costumes of the Taungthu women coming into Taunggyi bazaar from their outlying farms.

During the war we saw troops marching away from Taunggyi barracks on the first stage of their journey to India and Mesopotamia. Months later, some marched back, but many had been left behind at Kut, where dysentery or enteric had taken a bigger toll than Turkish bullets. When an epidemic of smallpox or plague descended on Taunggyi we saw another kind of procession. Corpses, wrapped only in a cloth, were carried on open biers down the road to the burning ghats on the far side of the town. A crowd of mourners surged around the bier, dancing, shouting, wailing, banging drums and castanets. But the world-wide epidemic of influenza in 1919 had a bigger mortality rate than even the more dreaded plague and smallpox. When it was at its height the stream of corpses from the barracks seemed never-ending.

Cherry trees bordered all the roads, and grew in every garden

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in Taunggyi. In January a climber on the Crag looked down upon a sea of pink, not the tender rose of English apple blossom, but a bold unafraid pink, the kind you get from mixing crimson lake and chinese white, or which you buy in a stick of coconut ice. For most of the year we blessed them either for their blossom, for their leafy shade, or for their morella-like fruit, which made such excellent cherry brandy. But for a few weeks in every year, when the branches were bare, they became anathema, for that was the time when the caterpillars appeared. Millions of them covered every cherry tree, bright green, dangling from the branches by long twisting threads, dropping on to our shoulders, heads and arms, or immolating themselves beneath our feet. The road was covered with the quick and the dead; the latter were very squashy green and white corpses, and the former displayed the anxiety common to all caterpillars to loop as rapidly as possible from one side of the road to the other and back again. Fortunately this particularly unpleasant cycle of their existence did not last long, and they disappeared as suddenly as they had come. One evening they would be hanging in thousands from every tree, and two days later the only indications of their existence were a few corpses on the road, and one or two stragglers disconsolately spinning in mid-air on a solitary thread.

At the corner where the main road was crossed by the road leading to our house, an old blind sweetmeat seller sat. Morning after morning she was guided up the road by a little girl, and at the corner her baskets were spread out, and they squatted down against the brick coping of a small bridge. Every evening at sunset the little assistant piled up the baskets, and balancing them on her head led the old woman back home. From my earliest days I remember that blind figure, and on the morning when for the last time, we drove away from Taunggyi, we passed her coming sightlessly up the road, led by the little girl towards their familiar 'pitch'. Hers was the only sweet-shop we knew, and there were not many days when one of us did not slip out of the garden gate, down our road and across a field to the crossroad corner, where for a couple of 'pice' we bought peanut and juggery toffee cooked

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on a bamboo sheet and delicious beyond any English sweet I have tasted; or salted maize seeds, and other native sweetmeats which I have now forgotten. From a hygienic point of view these expeditions of ours were lamentably indiscreet, but either we bore charmed lives or else much of the modern medical theory is over-cautious for we never suffered any severe gastric results; and though some people pulled long faces and held up horrified hands, we ran barefoot, paddled in every stream we could find, ate indescribable native concoctions, and apparently developed a natural immunity from dirt and disease.

Leaving the old woman peering blindly from beneath her large straw hat, we go down the road towards the town. We pass the bungalow of one of the Anglo-Indian clerks in government employ. The little garden in front is bright with morning glory, oleander and smilax, but though it is now five o'clock in the evening the lady of the house is still in her nightgown. What garments she wears beneath those ample folds I cannot hazard, but there must be plenty of them, for though nature has cushioned her adequately, all those bulges and hillocks cannot be only adipose tissue. Why she never wore any other garment was a mystery we could not solve. Indolence, or love of comfort, or possibly even lack of a dress? Whatever the reason, we never saw her clothed in any other fashion. Whenever we passed, morning or high noon, or evening there was that uncorsetted figure, ruffled up to the neck and down to the wrist, slopping about in carpet slippers, or swinging to and fro in a rocking-chair, while her voluminous nightgown belled about her.

Further down the road we pass the civil police barracks built around their parade ground, and opposite them the P.W.D. (Public Works Department) yard. This department is one of the sinews of our administration. If there is a house to be built, a sink to be unstopped, a road repaired, a bridge constructed, a swarm of bees to be smoked out, the P.W.D. is called in, and in course of time the work is either done or not. Beyond the P.W.D. yard the post office and the telegraph office stand side by side, and on the steps the 'peons' (messengers) of the various govern-

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ment offices are squatting while they wait for telegrams or mailbags. Passing some more bungalows, half concealed behind guava trees and poinsettia, we leave the American Baptist mission school on our right, and come into the main shopping street of Taunggyi.

Coming up the road towards us we see two haughty yet pathetic figures. They are exiles from Afghanistan, convicted of sedition and inciting to rebellion, and deported from their native mountains. Though their limbs are unfettered they give the impression, as they pace the roads of Taunggyi, of captive lions. They are magnificent men, over six feet tall, with bleak eyes, hooked nose and imperious mouth. Born to lead warriors, this circumscribed existence must fret them more than any fetters, and perhaps a death sentence would have been more merciful.

The road stretches hot beneath the noonday sun. Throughout the dry season the dust lies thick on it, kicked up by the hooves of bullocks into little puffs of smoke which rise slowly and then subside. When a rare motor passes, the wheels send up the dust in clouds which choke and blind before they settle in layers upon the shrubs and grass on the edge of the road.

The shops on either side of the road were long, low buildings with corrugated iron roofs. They were owned and run chiefly by Chinese and Indian shopkeepers; the Japanese at that time were not much in evidence, and the Burmans preferred to do their small-scale trading in wayside booths and in the open-air bazaar. I wonder if the sons of Tikaram and Ishar Singh still have shops in Taunggyi main street. Tikaram was a Bengali, Ishar Singh came from the Punjab. These shops had a wonderful medley of merchandise. Silk from Japan, cotton goods from Manchester, toys from Germany, earthenware and enamel goods, mirrors covered with gaudy flower paintings, glass bangles and necklaces, needles, cotton, scissors and biscuits, sugar, bags of flour, rice and occasionally a few tinned foods. Ishar Singh did tailoring in a small way, and a cumbersome Singer's treadle-machine clattered away on his veranda. When it rained the machine was brought inside the shop, where it usurped the only

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bit of empty floor space, and successfully defeated the efforts of the human voice to make itself audible above the din. The walls of Tikaram's shop were covered, where an empty space allowed, with highly-coloured pictures of Hindu mythology. By our western standards they were flagrantly indecent, but in my eyes, more innocent then than now, those elephantine heads, Shiva's twisted limbs, and Hanuman with his monkey face and many wives, were beautiful and exciting. I remember that Tikaram once gave me some of the pictures, and I took them home and begged mother to let me hang them on the nursery wall, and felt very injured at her emphatic refusal.

Facing the shops of the two Indian merchants was a Chinese shop, whose doorways perpetually emanated an unmistakably Chinese smell. Inside the shop the smell rose up and hit you fair and square. It was like no other smell, composed as it was of salt fish, unwashed Chinaman, human and animal excrement, preserved ginger, dried figs, and all kinds of odd Chinese fruits and foods which had been dried and preserved out of all recognition. A Chinese woman was usually in charge of the shop, a short, slant-eyed little woman, who seemed to spend the entire day suckling her latest-born, while round her crawled the rest of her brood, all of whom were slower even than the normal puppy to learn the most elementary principles of 'house-training'. The prospective buyer had to pick his way carefully among the ordure, and it was not astonishing the Europeans limited their purchases to non-edible articles. While we searched round the shelves for what we wanted, the wife tottered round the barrels of dried figs and rice and, disappearing into the back premises, called to her husband. In a few minutes he arrived, sleepy and indifferent. He seldom stirred to fetch anything we wanted, but gave orders to his wife. Her feet were stunted in the traditional Chinese fashion, bound up in tight blue bandages, but on these pitiful 'lily feet', a bare four inches in length, she stumped about the shop, and climbed chairs to reach down from the shelves any article we wanted. We bought bright red, blue and yellow paper there, for making kites; fireworks for Christmas and Guy Fawkes'

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day; little Chinese cups and saucers for our dolls' house, and lovely Burmese parasols made of oiled yellow and red parchment, which cast a warm glow over the skin. Every Burmese woman carries one, and they turn rain as effectively as they shade from sun.

Beyond the stretch of shops the main road ran on between the larger houses of well-to-do Burmans and Indians. In a big haw, or palace, on the left-hand side of the road lived Princess Tiptila. She was a person of some importance both in the eyes of the Shans and of the English. A daughter of the Sawbwa of Kengtung, she married into another state, and when her husband died, acted as regent for her son while he was a minor. In the early days of British administration her timely warning had prevented the assassination of the British agent to the Shan chieftains. I believe she was an exceptionally brilliant woman, of the stuff of which great queens are made, but when we children went to tea with her we saw quite another aspect. Bead curtains hung across the doorways of her house, and as she rarely opened her window shutters, the room in which she sat waiting to receive us was invariably very dark. At the back of my mind I always had the feeling that she was a kind of benevolent witch. Her smile may perhaps have caused that impression, secret and with a hint of derision in it. She was always dressed in a silk 'tamein' (skirt) of rich colouring, a tightly-fitting jacket, and a high Cossack-like turban. Her fingers were weighted with rings, which clinked against the teacups as she poured out the tea. Apparently she possessed only one teaspoon, since I clearly remember each of us stirring our cup and then handing on the spoon to the next-door neighbour. Like most Burmans, she was a passionate gambler, and the last news I had of Tiptila was that she was very feeble, and almost destitute, having gambled away all her money, property and jewellery.

Pasted in my father's scrapbook is a letter written by Tiptila in reply to an invitation to tea in our house. This is the translation: 'Much love, Mrs. Lee. Affectionately you have invited me to tea at 4 o'clock. I am very thankful. When it strikes 4 o'clock

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I shall come and meet the headmaster's wife, and therefore I am very glad.'

I remember on one such occasion when she came to tea she arrived in a cart drawn by trotting bullocks. Down the road, over the red bridge, past the clump of bamboos (haunted, so our ayah assured us, by the ghosts of two tigers), we heard the jingle of bells and then the bullock-cart rattled into view and came up the drive; the bullocks halted before the steps and stood swishing the flies away with their tails. Ducking her head to avoid knocking off her high turban against the hood, Tiptila crawled from the pink and red mattress on which she had been reclining, and slipped down between the wheels and the rumps of the bullocks, a feat almost impossible to perform gracefully, but Tiptila managed it. I can still see her walking up the veranda steps between the geraniums and maidenhair fern, a slight figure, one hand fingering the scarf thrown airily round her shoulders; the other gesturing with a large cheroot. 'Ma-i-la', 'Are you well?' she murmured to each of us as she shook hands in greeting, her fingers barely touching our palms, as though she found our Western mode of salutation repugnant. As most probably she did, for before European customs were introduced, a woman of Burma would have considered herself deeply insulted if any man other than her father or husband had ventured to touch even her hand. In the drawing-room she sipped her tea noisily, as good manners demanded, and nibbled cakes, and as she murmured polite replies to mother's conversation, her dark eyes wandered round the room. Curiously, appraisingly, scornfully? Inscrutable, they kept their secret.

One day Tiptila announced that she was going to build a pagoda. The site she chose was the crest of one of the low hills around Taunggyi. The ground was cleared of grass and wild raspberry bushes, and on an auspicious day chosen by astrologers, a great crowd gathered on the hilltop to watch the ceremony of burying the treasure. Under most Burmese pagodas some treasure lies hidden, and when the foundations are begun, pious folk collect to watch the ceremony, and throw in such treasure as they

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can afford. Our ayah gave us vivid accounts, doubtless very exaggerated, of all the treasure Tiptila brought for her pagoda, how chests containing silver and gold and jewels were lowered into the trenches and then covered with layers of bricks and mortar. A few days later the news flew round Taunggyi that thieves had tunnelled beneath the foundations and stolen the treasure. That evening we climbed the hill, and scrambling over bricks and rubble, peered fearfully into the violated treasure chambers, half expecting to see one of the robbers glaring ferociously up at us. Poor Tiptila was so discouraged at this beginning that she stopped further work on the pagoda, and when we left Taunggyi, mounds of rubbish and crumbling brick still disfigured the hilltop, but the grass was creeping over them, and harebells swayed in the crevices.

Behind Tiptila's haw another big house stood among plantains and banyan trees. It was built in the Burmese style, standing on piles, one-storyed with a corrugated iron roof whose eaves were carved like wings, or springing flames. The house had once been the property of a rich Burman who one day murdered his wife. The authorities suspected, and the natives knew, him to be the murderer, but nothing could be proved, and it appeared as though he would succeed in evading justice. But his dead wife's brother was determined to avenge his sister's death. Night after night he crept up to the house and threw things on to the roof, things which fell with a soft thud and things which fell with a clatter. Gradually the guilty conscience of the murderer became convinced that his dead wife's ghost sat upon the roof and thus disturbed his uneasy slumbers. Then one night the brother brought with him an English police officer, and another witness, and began to throw things on the roof. There was a slither, a clatter, a bump; then in the silence that followed a terrified voice screamed from inside the house, 'All right, Ma Hson, bang away, bump away; but if you try to come inside I'll use my knife on you again'. A few minutes later his doors were burst in, and there entered, not his wife's ghost, but a squad of policemen. He was arrested, confessed his guilt and executed. That, at any rate, was

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the story that our ayah told us, and I believe it was more or less correct. Though the 'ghost' on the roof had such a terrestrial explanation, oddly enough the house never lost the reputation of being haunted, and year after year stood empty and sinister in its overgrown and deserted garden.

Beyond Tiptila's house the road curved onwards, blinding white in the sunshine; past the open-air bazaar with its thatched stalls and chattering crowds; past the two little lakes ringed with rushes and green with scum and water-weed, over which dragonflies skimmed and hovered and kingfishers flashed like winged lapis; past the path which, branching away, led to the burning ground adjoining the Moslem cemetery; onwards towards the edge of the plateau where in a series of twists and curves the road drops down from the hills of Taunggyi to the Yaungwhe plain.

II

Adjoining our garden were the grounds of the Shan Chiefs' School, of which my father was the 'Saya-Gyi', or Big Teacher. The dormitories and classrooms formed the three sides of a square in which the boys did their daily drill under Suba Singh's supervision, played football or bowled at the nets. I recall the hubbub that arose one evening when a large king cobra was found coiled up in one of the nets. Daddy's fiat had gone forth that no creature on the compound was to be killed without his permission, and so 'nets' were suspended while the master on duty came hurrying across to our house to report the presence of the cobra. Daddy went over to the field to see it, and, like Pilate, confronted the agitated boys with the query — 'Why, what evil hath he done?' and reminded them that they, as Buddhists, were forbidden to take life. If they killed that cobra they might perhaps be killing someone's grandfather! In no uncertain chorus the boys replied, 'Sir, we think the grandfather had better be killed'. And so permission was given, to the games' master's obvious relief, for he had been having uneasy visions of being obliged to superintend the eviction of the cobra without casualties on either side.

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Mention of the nets reminds me of many a match played upon the school field. The grass was green, and the earth was red, and at one end three large oak trees and a small lake marked the boundary; one might almost have thought oneself at a cricket match in England except that the players wore delicate green and blue and pink turbans and ran barefoot. The Chiefs' School produced many a fine cricket team, which could hold its own with most others in Burma, native or European. In our latter years, when Taunggyi was no longer a ten-days' bullock-cart journey from civilization, teams from other schools and clubs sometimes visited us. I recall in particular a team from the Diocesan boys' school in Rangoon, where my father had been principal before coming to Taunggyi, and where I had been born. The boys there were Anglo-Indian or Anglo-Burman; the team that came up was a most good-humoured and sporting crowd, but, not unnaturally, they had the self-confidence of the sophisticated town boy and expected to meet a team of yokels and barbarians. I have forgotten now which side won, but I know that the sons of the Shan chiefs did not discredit themselves, and earned the respect of their opponents. I think the Diocesan boys found the real barbarians in my sisters and myself, for we were at the age when we cared nothing for our appearance, wore neither shoes nor stockings — tomboys, possessing no feminine guile or wiles, and as free from self-consciousness in the presence of boys as of girls. We must have nonplussed our visitors, accustomed as they were to the society of Anglo-Indian girls, who mature quickly and, at an age when an English girl is an awkward hoyden, is as pretty and practised a piece of femininity as one could find anywhere. One of the Diocesan boys asked me tenderly one evening after cricket whether I would be his 'little sweetheart', and I recall now his expression of utter taken-abackness at my matter-of-fact answer, 'Oh, no, thank you'. After that there were no more tender passages, but instead, what I did understand and much preferred, dozens of bottles of Pascall's boiled sweets.

As well as cricket the Chiefs' School played baseball, an un-

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usual game to find in countries under English government. My father's admiration for this fine game dated from a voyage many years before, on the Patrick Henderson boat *Pegu*. One of his fellow passengers was a champion pitcher from Pittsburg, and he and daddy beguiled many tedious hours of the voyage with the theory and practice of pitch and swerve. He never lost his interest in the game, and when he came to Taunggyi he formed a baseball team in the Chiefs' school. The chance visit of some Americans from the Yenangyoung oilfields in Lower Burma gave an impetus to the game; they displayed the greatest interest in the school team, and spent nearly every evening of their stay in Taunggyi in coaching the boys. Nor did their interest stop there, for some weeks after they had gone the school received a gift from them in the shape of a baseball outfit, and baseball was played there until my father left.

The games master, Mr. Bird, the same whom the cobra had so sorely perplexed, was the senior master who, for his sins, had to teach me arithmetic. When the war was over our governess had departed, leaving me with the haziest notions of decimal fractions and simple interest. And then the question arose — who should teach me arithmetic, algebra and geometry? At last it was decided that I should join the mathematics lessons of one of the forms at school. By this time Mary had been sent to England, so I went alone to the school and, planting myself at a desk among twenty budding Shan princes, I proceeded to try Mr. Bird's patience to the limit. I have an infinite capacity for not understanding 'sums', and Mr. Bird found me more trouble than all the rest of the class put together. Under him I wrestled with starving garrisons and trains passing each other, and in my ears still rings his patient and despairing cry, 'Do you follow, Miss Nellie, do you follow?' I didn't and never will.

The other members of the staff were either Anglo-Indians or Burmans. The latter dressed always in the national costume, and they were wise. When the Burman dons European garb he immediately looks awkward and self-conscious: by keeping to their traditional dress the Burmese masters retained their ease and

dignity of bearing. They took a pride in the spotlessness of their jackets, in the silken rustle of their pasoes and the correct folds of their turbans, and were good to look at as they went about their work. The Anglo-Indian masters were less picturesque, but most of them were good teachers. Since leaving Taunggyi we have lost touch with them, but have heard that one of them, at least, succeeded in passing into the Civil Service, and became a district commissioner.

One member of the staff I recall with particular affection. This was Cissie, the school clerk, such a tiny one. Morning after morning she came trotting past our house to the school office, a comic little figure in the queerest assortment of garments which were usually far too big for her tiny frame. Under a large hat, much betrimmed with feathers, ribbons and flowers, her black eyes sparkled and her good-natured lips grinned. One bony little hand clutched a reticule, the other an umbrella or parasol, according to the state of the weather. I believe she would not have considered herself respectably dressed without these accessories. She usually wore high-buttoned boots, but occasionally blossomed out in high-heeled shoes and open-work stockings of powerful hue, canary yellow, blue or violet.

She lived in her father's house, in one of the Taunggyi's backstreets, a ramshackle bungalow, rotten with damp, riddled with termite, and held together chiefly, I believe, by the matted growth of jasmine and morning glory, which hung over its roof, trailed along the veranda and obscured the windows. The overgrown patch of garden in front of the house was always swarming with Cissie's brothers and sisters of every age, size, and colour, and in the midst of the clutch sat Cissie's father in wrinkled pantaloons, native slippers, and one of daddy's cast-off coats. He drove old 'Invicta', the Taunggyi steam-roller, not a highly-salaried post, and Cissie was the mainstay of the large family. She had taught herself typewriting by a system of her own, and her little claw-like fingers bounced and rattled over the keys at no unworthy speed. She knew neither book-keeping nor shorthand, but she could keep accounts accurately, and even though

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she used her fingers for adding up, she used them with astonishing rapidity. In order to supplement her clerk's salary, she did sewing for mother, and after school hours would come trotting across to our house, perch herself at the sewing-table on the veranda, and whirr away at the sewing-machine as if her very existence depended on her diligence. She was a good friend to us, and when we were in difficulties with subtraction or long division we crept out to Cissie on the veranda to 'beg her help, and though scared stiff at being discovered in the act of helping us, she refused our plaintive requests only when she thought we were sure to be caught.

Soon after we came to England we heard from Cissie that she had left the Chiefs' School. She wrote from Rangoon, telling us of her marriage. 'He is a very good man', she wrote, 'he does not beat me'. Since then Cissie has swum out of our ken, and I have often wondered how Fate has treated her. Gently, I hope, and that Cissie, grown plump now, rocks placidly on some creeper-hung veranda in Burma, and remembers us kindly.

As we do her and all our old Burmese and Anglo-Indian friends.

Two or three days before the school was due to open, the boys began to drift in from their distant homes. Many of them made a state entry into Taunggyi, arriving with the panoply and dignity befitting the sons of chieftains. Some came in bullock-carts, strings of them, filled with retainers, crawling up the road towards the school buildings. Some rode on horseback with pack-mules following, the horses gaily caparisoned and jingling with bells. Some came on elephant-back, under gilt howdas, and with attendants holding over them the long-handled umbrellas indicative of royal rank. The gorgeous processions came up our drive and halted before our veranda steps, where the arrogant young chieftain suddenly turned into a nervous and respectful schoolboy before his headmaster. The retainers returned to their states; the boys settled down in their places, and the school year had begun.

The boys wore no school uniform; at gymnasium, games or

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agriculture they wore shorts, but at all other times they wore the Shan costume. When the whole school turned out in crocodile to march through Taunggyi in a King's birthday parade, or some other public occasion they were a picturesque and exotic sight, in their white jackets, delicately coloured turbans and flowing trousers, marching in alert precision. As sons of the Shan chiefs they were very conscious of their dignity, and their aloof and arrogant air often aroused the ire of the only other big native school in Taunggyi, run by the American Baptists. Those pupils were drawn from every class, and their school uniform was a khaki short and shirt, and I think that they were conscious of their drab appearance beside the shimmer and rustle of our boys' silken clothes.

Periodically a parent would appear in Taunggyi, having come to see how his son was progressing, or to interview dad on some matter. He brought his wives with him, and with a rabble of retainers behind them, they came up the drive and were welcomed on the veranda steps by daddy and mother. Leaving the retainers squatting on the drive, the sawbwa and his wives were ushered into the drawing-room where, sitting on the extreme edge of the chairs, they sipped tea with loud sucking noises expressive of polite appreciation. When tea was over we children were called upon to entertain the guests, by dancing a highland fling or playing the piano. I didn't mind the fling, but how I hated 'playing a piece'. My fingers shook with such panic that it was a mystery how they ever struck the right notes. I remember in particular one such occasion when I had to entertain a sawbwa and his wives. The old man was a most unprince-like figure, for, though his clothes were rich, they were bespattered with betel juice from the quid which he chewed unceasingly, keeping it tucked away in his cheek even when he drank his tea or mumbled his cake. But he was a jovial soul, grinning and gesticulating as he talked to daddy. Presently he noticed the piano and immediately inquired what it was. Daddy explained its function and when the Sawbwa asked for a demonstration I was chosen as the unhappy performer. With sinking heart I began to play my

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'safest' piece 'Santa Lucia'. I had barely played a page when the Sawbwa broke into shouts of laughter, and rising from his chair, he ambled across to the piano, pushed my hands away from the keys, shut down the piano lid and hobbled out of the room. Still roaring with laughter he tottered along the veranda, followed by his wives, their smiling tranquillity quite undisturbed by the sawbwa's behaviour. I rather fancied myself on my rendering of 'Santa Lucia' and was bitterly mortified by its reception. We never discovered why he was so tickled, but he did not forget the piano. On his next visit several months later, he had no sooner entered the room than he hobbled across to the piano, flung open the lid, lifted the embroidered strip of felt that lay along the keys 'to keep out the damp', gingerly struck a note and again dissolved into spasms of laughter.

Very often these visits of a sawbwa were prompted primarily by the desire to 'wangle' something out of daddy, some extra luxury to be granted to his son in the school, or an assurance that somehow or other daddy would arrange a good Pass for him in the Final Examination. The immemorial Eastern tradition of giving and receiving bribes, was to the sawbwas, as to every native, part of the system of living, and they were often puzzled by the government official's scrupulous attitude towards this practice. I remember one day a sawbwa arrived at our house, and after the usual greetings had been exchanged, he beckoned to a retainer who brought forward and placed on the veranda floor, a small Christmas tree, hung with glass balls, tinsel sprays — and hundreds of sovereigns. Each coin was suspended in a little net from the piny branches. Dad shook his head. 'A toy for the children', the sawbwa urged. Very politely Dad told the chief that he could not possibly accept such a gift on our behalf, but that he would like to keep the tree. A pair of scissors were produced, the sovereigns were snipped off the branches and returned to the sawbwa, and we were given the little tree with its bright decorations. I have no idea what particular favour the sawbwa had hoped to elicit from my father. On another occasion dad was correcting one of the thousands of exam. papers, which came

to him from all over Burma; at the bottom of one stumbling answer he read these pathetic words: 'Sir, would an emerald ring be of any use to you?'

After the long holiday from Christmas to March, the boys worked in a nine-month stretch, broken only by three holidays. One was on the King's birthday, one on my father's birthday in July, and one at the Thadinjut, or end of the Bhuddist Lent in November. The first and the last were official holidays throughout Burma, the second was unofficial but became hallowed by custom.

After breakfast on July 2nd, the whole school, masters and boys, marched to our house and there the head boy read out a sonorous birthday address to my father which terminated in the request for a holiday, and an invitation to us to attend a school pwe or concert in the evening. On this auspicious day the boys were given town leave, and one and all streamed away from our house down to the town, leaving the school buildings deserted till sunset.

In the evening we walked across to the school for the boys' pwe. Every item was decided and arranged by the boys themselves, unassisted by any of the staff, and they usually succeeded in producing an entertainment of considerable originality and variety. We saw, perhaps, a native sword dance, executed with verve and ferocity and much flashing of yard-long dahs. Or there was an exhibition of Shan wrestling. One favourite 'turn' was the dramatization of one of Aesop's Fables, and the boys showed remarkable ingenuity in devising the costumes out of bamboo, paper and an assortment of clothes. In their hands Aesop's lions, foxes, frogs and tortoises became weird creatures, who with their winged paws, glaring eyeballs and flaming tongues resembled the mythological monsters sculptured at the entrance to a pagoda or a haw. Sometimes the recitations they chose were redeemed from the banal by their unconsciously but extremely funny interpretations. One year the recitation was 'Bruce and the Spider'. Bruce was dressed in the glittering panoply of a Shan 'warlord' and as he lay in defeated despair on the floor of the cave he smoked a Burma cheroot with the most manifest enjoyment.

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The spider which gyrated downwards from the ceiling was a truly fearsome creature nearly a yard wide, sufficient to convince the boldest man of the unhealthiness of that particular locality. On another occasion 'The Spider and the Fly' was performed with much gusto. The spider, one of the senior boys, was a frightful looking monster, upon whose eight legs had been fastened an enormous bamboo and paper-work stomach. A junior and very small boy 'interpreted' the fly, and when at last he yielded to the spider's blandishments and approached him, a kind of trap-door opened in the spider's belly and the tiny fly, with many kicks and screams, was gradually engulfed in the vasty cavern.

The concert invariably ended with a representation of one of the traditional Shan or Burmese plays. These plays or rather operas, for they are always accompanied by music, are part of the national literature of the country. In them kings and queens address one another in the flowery and highly stylized language of the old Burmese court; lovers sing mournful or ecstatic ditties, and clowns do tricks, toss off puns or win the groundlings' hearts by pointed references to local events and personages. Most of the plot and the language was completely incomprehensible to us, but to the rest of the school, the staff, and the servants who clustered round the doors and windows, the play was the high spot of the concert. From places unknown the boys had succeeded in borrowing musical instruments and from the beginning to the end of the play the orchestra never flagged for a moment, in what was to us an endless series of discords. Like the music and the play, the instruments were traditional; there were bamboo flutes, brass castanets, and wooden clappers; drums of various kinds, some single, others hung several together on a bamboo frame, and played by one person; round or triangular gongs hung on a single frame, and struck with padded hammers. Another instrument, which is seen at every Burmese pwe is boat-shaped, with 'keys' made of bamboo in varying thickness, and when struck by bamboo sticks they give out mellow notes of varying pitch and resonance. A very little of the opera satisfied us, and we soon left the boys to declaim their speeches and bang their instruments till

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whatever hour daddy had given them permission, while we walked across the football field towards our house and bed.

Thadinjut, when the school had its third holiday, is the biggest and most popular festival in the Burmese year. At about the time when Catholics light their candles to symbolize the 'lux perpetua' which they pray may shine upon the souls in Purgatory, the Buddhists in Burma light their paper lanterns to celebrate the end of their Lent. For weeks before everyone has been busy making lanterns of all shapes and sizes, every booth displays packets of candles for sale, while the Chinese shops do a roaring trade in coloured paper.

On the evening of Thadinjut we children were always allowed to stay up late, and when supper was over, and the last gleams of sunset had left the sky, the whole family went out to see the illuminations. We avoided the main street with its government offices, and European houses, and instead wandered through the backstreets and alleys of the town, whose squalor and dirt had, on this night, been transformed into a fairyland of coloured, twinkling, swaying lights. The simplest and perhaps the most effective of all the lanterns, was that shaped like a four-petalled crocus, whose head rose out of a bamboo stalk. When the first star winked in the darkening sky, as if at a given signal every path and lane, every passage and house front unfolded its scentless and flickering blossoms. The poorest house had at least one candle burning inside its paper lantern, and some of the houses had their roofs and steps, verandas and windows outlined in rows of glowing crocuses.

As the night advanced other shapes appeared among these gardens of pink, green and yellow fire. Dragons and stars, suns and half-moons, triangles and polygons of light swung to and fro among the crocuses; lanterns of every shape and size and colour, hanging from the eaves and gables, reared aloft on swaying poles, suspended on ropes across the streets or carried in the hands of the laughing, jostling crowds. Every little nook, every courtyard revealed the innate artistry of the people, their instinctive feeling

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for the right colour and the right place. Round a curving bay of one little lake a double row of lanterns gave back a twin reflection which from time to time, when a fish leaped, was shattered into splinters of brilliance. Taunggyi was encircled with lights. Along the hilltops which ringed the town, lights twinkled and glimmered, here singly, there in patterns of colour. Wherever a pagoda thrust up its slender spire into the night, the coloured lights girdled the plinths and flickered in the porches. On the hill slopes the steps leading up to the pagodas were outlined in fire, and looking up at them from the hollow of the saucer in which Taunggyi lay, these lines of fire were continually darkened by the stream of worshippers ascending and descending the steps. All that night and the following night the lights danced, and to the music of gongs, clappers and drums, the people sang and joked and splashed water at each other.

December 18, 1941: 'From to-night Burma will be totally blacked out.'

That statement in the English Press filled me with sadness; my imagination could supply so much that was lacking in its official brevity. No lights in that Land of Lights! Darkness in the villages when the sun has set, and 'Children's-go-to-bed' time comes (8 o'clock); no cheerful fires on the verandas to illuminate 'Lads-go-courting' time, about 9 o'clock. No pinpoints of light along the plinths of the pagodas to keep worship alive during the hours of 'All-the-world-quiet' time. To-night Burma is blacked out. Village fires quench your glow, little crocus lanterns dim your bright petals. Out, out, all you flickering candles. . . .

CHAPTER V

PAGODAS AND PARSONS

LOOKING back on my childhood I realize in what a queer mixture our life was stirred. Visitors coming up to Taunggyi from Lower Burma exclaimed with delight at the 'Englishness' of our surroundings, at the roses and heliotrope and delphiniums in the garden borders, the oaks and pine trees, the home-made bread, and strawberries and cream. One visitor, a charming missionary from Rangoon, wrote these lines in my autograph album:

For in this bit of land I've found
A flowery piece of England's ground
With English speech and English ways
And children playing English plays . . .

English songs, and on Sunday evenings the prayer that is for ever England, 'Lighten our darkness we beseech Thee, O Lord'. Yes, but cannas and bamboos grew in the garden also, and snakes slid under the rose-bushes and the call of the monastery gongs drifted on the evening haze, and beyond the garden railings which fenced in this bit of England lay the world of Buddhism, and we breathed in the air of that alien world and it became a part of our being.

Of us children, I mean. For the grown-ups, that world of Burma and Buddha must necessarily have existed parallel with and alien to their own English heritage. But we grew up in it and it was our world, and to some extent will always remain so. I am not implying that I was or am or ever could be a Buddhist or theosophist. But what child could be born in, and live for sixteen unbroken years in a land which is as steeped in the religion of the people as Burma is, and remain untouched by it, nor absorb something of its spirit? Pagodas and Buddhas, and bells and the sacred duck and gongs and the Water Festival; these will always

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be friendly and familiar concepts; they are part of the background of my life, that background acquired unconsciously during the formative years of childhood, and are mixed up with Cinderella and my first paint box, and the 'Light of the World', and doing sums, and being told to eat with my mouth closed.

What is this world of Buddhism in which we were reared?

The Buddha, whose followers number more than a quarter of the world's population was born about 623 B.C., and was the son of an Indian king. Prince Gautama possessed everything that, humanly speaking, is necessary for the complete enjoyment of life, but at the age of twenty-nine he broke all his ties and left home for ever, to try and find escape from the misery and futility of existence. First he sought it by the way of charitable works, then by philosophy, and then by asceticism and self-torture. But all these failed and he sank into despair. Then one day as he sat in deepest meditation, illumination suddenly broke upon him, and he perceived the secret of existence and the cause of all misery, and having learnt the cause, he was enabled to teach the method of deliverance. In that moment when he attained supreme wisdom he became a Buddha, that is to say, 'The Enlightened One'.

Briefly, this is the Buddhist teaching. There are thirty-one rungs in the ladder of existence. The lowest are occupied by those in Hell, or who in the form of animals are reaping punishment for previous sins. Mankind is on the fifth rung. By meditation, detachment from the illusory vanities of life, or by good deeds, man can ascend rung by rung, until, escaping from the law of rebirth, he enters the endless peace of Nirvana.

The truths upon which the Buddhist must meditate in order to acquire detachment, were called by Gautama the Four Noble Truths. The first three are the Truth of Suffering, of the Cause of Suffering, and of the Cessation of Suffering. The fourth is the Path which leads to the Cessation of Suffering, and is known as the Holy Eightfold Path, 'Right belief, right feeling, right speech, right effort . . .' The good deeds which assist a man in his upward struggle are many. 'To treat parents with tenderness and affection, to cherish well one's wife and children . . . to make offerings

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and give abundant alms . . . to abstain from spirituous liquors . . . to be patient and endure suffering . . . to be unmoved; to be of tranquil mind; to be exempt from passion; to be perfectly composed and fearless amid all earthly dangers . . . These are blessed things' said the most excellent Buddha. 'Mark thou them well, so shalt thou enjoy the peace of Neikhan.'

In strict theory there are no religious services in Buddhism; and the Image of Buddha stands in his shrines merely as an example and reminder of the 'just man made perfect'. But the practice has outrun the theory, a philosophy passes into religion, and on feast days the pagodas are thronged with people bringing offerings of flowers and candles, and who kneeling before the Buddha, murmur prayers and praises.

The Buddhist monks, so conspicuous in their saffron robes, are those who have abjured the world in order to follow more perfectly the Law of Good. They live a community life in monasteries or poongyi-kyaungs, where they pass their life in meditation, study, and in teaching the village boys the law of Buddha. At some time or other in his life every Buddhist male must enter a monastery, even if it is for only a day. Until he has done so he has not attained humanity, but is an animal. All who have never worn the yellow robe, such as women or non-Buddhists, are not ranked as human beings, and the Burmese phrase for a foreigner is 'Kalā ni gaung', i.e. 'animals of foreigners'.

The poongyi's robe is beautiful and unmistakable, consisting of a single cloth of saffron yellow, thrown round his body like a toga, leaving one arm and shoulder uncovered. Bare head and barefoot they go, but each poongyi carries a large fan, with which he may shield his eyes from temptation should a woman cross his path. Every poongyi must take a vow of chastity, and so strict is the rule, that he must not take anything from a woman's hand, nor look upon her face, nor travel in the same vehicle with her, even if that woman be his mother.

Naturally the academic side of Buddhist theology never touched us; and like the majority of the Burmese people, we were concerned only with its domestic details. Adjoining our garden was a poongyi-

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kyaung, and from it the monks went out daily to collect alms and food, and few of them bothered to put up their fans when we passed them. Our ayahs and most of our servants were Buddhists and we took an immense interest in their accounts of the various festivals and ceremonies. I remember so clearly seeing Ma Hla come running laughing into our nursery one day during the Water Festival, and showing us her skirt and jacket soaked with water which had been thrown upon her by other revellers. On our daily walks with her she was always ready to take us to a pagoda and nothing pleased us better than to wander from shrine to shrine watching the people laying coins before the Buddha, lighting candles or putting flowers in the vases and saying their prayers. We accepted all this as naturally as they did it, and without embarrassment. I recall a Burmese lady who was our fellow traveller in our compartment when we were on the way to Mandalay. She was elderly with an aristocrat's charm and ease of manner. She knew no English, but she chatted in Burmese to mother and daddy, and smiled at us, and gave us presents of sugar cane and mangosteens. The train ran on towards Mandalay and suddenly the old lady stopped talking and knelt upon the carriage seat and with a rosary between her fingers began to murmur prayers. Over the horizon upon which her eyes were fixed had appeared the hazy outlines of the Arakan Pagoda, the next most venerated shrine in Burma after the Shwe Dagon in Rangoon. For the remainder of the journey until we reached Mandalay, she did not cease to pray. For her as for our ayah, prayer came as naturally as eating and a railway carriage is as good a place for praying as another.

Wherever you turn your eyes in Burma you see a pagoda. Until I was twelve the only church I had seen was the hideous little Catholic church in Taunggyi. Church bells existed only in pictures and in my imagination, but the music of pagoda bells and monastery gongs must have been among the earliest and sweetest sounds to fall upon my baby ears. Dressing in our best and going off to church was a much more unusual and exciting event than going to a pagoda which we could do any day. No wonder that I

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took all Buddhism for granted. I do think it a little surprising that I never got the two religions mixed in my own mind; as far back as I can remember Christianity and Buddhism existed in two distinct compartments. We played among the pagodas and the Buddhas but we said our prayers at home and in church. That I think summarizes my attitude towards the two worlds which encircled me.

A pagoda for a playground. Lucky child! What more exciting one could be wanted, and we had so many. Taunggyi was ringed with pagodas. There was the 'Golden Pagoda', as we called it, standing on one of the western hills fronting the Crag, and approached by a steep stairway covered with a tiered roof. At the foot of the hill was a small poongyi-kyaung, surrounded by pine and oak trees, and flanked on one side by farm lands. In its self-sufficient peace the place stood as a type of all religious communities, those nuclei of quietness amid the world's uproar. We often went there; mother or our governess sat and sewed while we ran races round the plinth of the pagoda, or climbed the covered stairway and peeped at the Buddha inside the shrine. Occasionally a yellow-robed poongyi emerged from the monastery and strolled around the pagoda, but we might not have existed for all the notice he took of us.

In contrast with the tranquillity of this place, the monastery and pagoda on the immediate outskirts of the town seemed perpetually buzzing with life. The open space around the pagoda was always full of people, who had climbed up the steep steps from the town, bringing offerings for the Buddha, and when they had lighted their candles and said their prayers they squatted around the frangipani trees, and gossiped with the other worshippers. Like the parish church of the English countryside the place was the focus of social life. The very statue of the Buddha seemed more alive than the majority of the figures which dreamed away their stony existence in the dimly-lit shrines. This Buddha's eyes appeared to hold points of light, and above the glittering tinsel robe which had been draped around his shoulders, his lips were laughing.

On the lower shoulder of the Crag a cluster of pagodas rose

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against a background of pines and jungle, a lovely situation for a place of worship. Four miles of jungle path, zig-zagging up the face of the Crag, led to the pagodas. It was a favourite spot for picnics. The walk there, though steep, was shaded by overhanging trees, covered with tufts of yellow lichen of which we would take home bunches to unfuse as 'tea' for our dolls' parties. Centipedes and millipedes crossed the path, or a 'football poochi', at our approaching footsteps, curled himself up despairingly. 'Poochi' is the Hindustani word for any kind of insect; this particular variety was a long, shiny-backed, multi-legged creature, which at a hint of danger, rolled himself into an impenetrable ball. The Burman calls it the 'earring' insect.

Arrived at the pagodas, the grown-ups would stretch themselves under the pine trees to rest, but we rushed off instantly to the pagodas. They stood there like a ring of white tapers gleaming in the sunlight, amongst them rising the wooden roof, whose tiers indicate sanctity or royalty. There are several different kinds of pagoda in Burma and the Shan states. Some, like the famous Shwe Dagon in Rangoon, are built over relics of the Buddha; some contain sacred texts or manuscripts; others have been built to house statues of the Buddha. The majority of the small pagodas dotted over the country are of this latter variety, and have been built by some pious person or family wishing to acquire merit. All works of charity, such as building a bridge, a well, a zayat or resthouse for travellers, feeding the poor, acquire merit, but better than any of these is to build a monastery or a pagoda. The man who does this is assured of happiness in his next incarnation. This accounts for the enormous number of pagodas scattered all over the country. Some are very small, not more than ten feet high, built of whitewashed brick, and engaging in their very simplicity. Others are larger, more imposing, with a gilded spire, perhaps, or adorned with elaborate sculpture, but all, excepting very old pagodas built on the Indian model, show the same essential characteristics. From a square or polygonal plinth the bell-like body of the pagoda passes imperceptibly into the spire, whose summit is encircled by a metal 'hti' (literally umbrella).

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This hti is also bell-shaped, an open-work crown, surmounted by a tall metal rod. From the numerous rings in diminishing sizes of which the hti is composed, hang small bells, whose tongues are so light that they are moved by the smallest stir of air. The sweet, clear tinkle of pagoda bells is perhaps the most characteristic sound of Burma; certainly it is the one which sings the longest in the memory. The spire is moulded in a series of rings, carved with scrolls and designs of the sacred lotus leaf. The bell-like body is ornamented in a variety of shapes, but the most usual feature is the serpent which encircles the pagoda with manifold coils, a reminder of the ancient animistic religion of pre-Buddhist days.

One of the pagodas among which we played on the Taunggyi Crag was encircled by the primitive serpent, and its coils afforded an easy foothold for our bare toes as we tried to scramble up the sides. But soon the heat of the sun drove us indoors. Beneath the tiered porch before the chief pagoda we rode horseback on the grinning stone chinthés there. Chinthés, or griffins, are found in every pagoda, either guarding the steps leading up to the shrine, or flanking the corners of the plinth; each a replica of the other, but, though the form is traditional, it is carved with a gay boldness and freedom which is the chief charm of Burmese art. I wonder if those two white chinthés still guard the crumbling brick steps of that hill-top pagoda. To their snarling jaws we harnessed our reins; regardless of the menace in their protruding eyes we bounced up and down on their backs; and, balanced on their ears and on the winged paws and haunches, we consumed sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs and jam tarts. At the top of the steps was a small veranda, supported by a double row of pillars, lacquered red below and gilt above, and whose capitals flowered into petals of red, blue, green and yellow glass. Two vaulted doorways led from the veranda into the inner shrine where a huge Buddha gleamed among the shadows. Cross-legged, with downcast eyes, and eternal smile, he sat there meditating; one shoulder bare, the other draped with the ascetic folds of his priestly toga; heedless alike of our chatter, of his worshippers' murmured prayers, and of the ever-pervading smell of bat.

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Usually when we arrived there for a picnic, the pagodas were deserted, and we could play among them, uninterrupted and un-interrupting, the only worshippers being Maung Hsan and Kantu. Their devotions were soon over; with palms together they would shikoe (do obeisance) before the Buddha, murmur some prayers, put a few pice in the upturned palm, and then stretch themselves in the shade and go to sleep. Once, however, our picnic coincided with a Buddhist feast, and when we emerged from the over-shadowed path on to the summit, we saw that the pine-strewn clearing was crowded with people who had climbed up from Taunggyi and the neighbouring villages on pilgrimage to the shrine. So we could not play on our chinthés that day; instead we left the pilgrims and retreated to the refuge of a zayat which had been built at a little distance from the pagodas, where we picnicked and played some other games which did not require chinthés.

I remember on one such picnic to the pagodas there was a couple in the party whose engagement was imminent. The girl was staying with us during the hot weather, and the young man had followed her up from Rangoon in order to put an end to his suspense. After lunch the two vanished; we were too young then to take much interest in such romances, and quite forgetful of them we were wandering around among the pagodas, when Mary heard a muffled voice declare: 'It's a matter of earning our bread and butter, darling . . .' We retreated hastily. That night we told mother that Mr. M— must be frightfully poor and hungry; and not until we stayed with them some years later, and saw their pretty home in Rangoon, was the impression of their invincible poverty erased from my mind.

Small though it was, Taunggyi could yet boast of at least four 'branches' of Christianity. All resources were, so to speak, pooled and everyone could dip in the pool. At one time or another I have attended Catholic Mass, Baptist Sunday School, Seventh Day Adventist meetings, as well as Anglican services conducted by C of E clergymen, Baptist missionaries and unqualified and apprehensive laymen.

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This dilettantism, however, was the exception rather than the rule, and most Sunday evenings saw us trailing up the hill towards the Circuit House and evening service according to the Book of Common Prayer. During our sixteen years in the station there was no real Anglican church in Taunggyi. Services were held in the Circuit House, that is the bungalow which had been built for the accommodation of government officials on tour. On Sundays, however, it acquired a spiritual status and the dining-room was used for services. The altar and harmonium were kept there permanently, and it was difficult sometimes to convince the durwan (caretaker) of the Circuit House that the altar must not be used as a sideboard. Two or three times a year a government chaplain came up to Taunggyi from Mandalay or Rangoon, and then we had the full Anglican services; but for the greater part of the year our spiritual pabulum consisted of evening service conducted by anybody who could be persuaded to read it. Sometimes the Resident officiated, sometimes my father, or the doctor, or the forestry officer, or an American Baptist missionary. Any lady with the slightest degree of musical ability was pressed into playing the harmonium, a decrepit instrument whose vitals never recovered from being partially devoured by rats. Either Mary or I was nearly always made to carry round the offertory bags, a task I loathed, for it made me feel foolish and I invariably tripped over the hassocks. Dogs usually accompanied their owners to church, and if they were well trained settled down on the veranda to sleep until the service was over. But if they were badly trained, as ours, then one of two things happened. Either they fought outside, until in desperation one of the congregation stalked out and separated them; or else they slunk in, sniffed round among the shoes and skirts and trousers until one particular smell had been located; then each dog would curl himself round a hassock and scratch and bite fleas off himself. Of course our dogs were the worst of the bunch; no matter how carefully we tied them up at home with instructions to the servants to see that they did not get away, sooner or later during the service one of the 'bobbery pack' arrived. Many a Sunday evening, daddy, who had remained at

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home, saw Mary or me, pattering up the drive, bringing home Phil or Ma Mac or Bitchie, who had once again proved their bazaar breeding. It was bad enough on 'ordinary' Sundays, when the service was, at its best, an amateur performance, but when the padre was conducting a 'real' service, then we felt that our dogs had let us down badly.

I can still see so clearly that Circuit House dining-room, with its stencilled green fleur-de-lis border on the distempered walls; mother's feet pounding away at the harmonium pedals; the altar with its brass candlesticks; and beside it a door leading to the kitchen where the caretaker was smoking his hubble-bubble or cooking his evening chupattis. When darkness began to throw shadows around the room, the caretaker, leaving his hubble-bubble for a moment, used to creep in and place one paraffin lamp on the harmonium, and one on a stand in the corner of the room. I can hear, always half a beat behind the music, the nasal voices of one devout couple who sang lustily and slowly, and swayed their bodies to the tunes of Hymns A. and M.

When the service was over we drifted out on to the veranda where the waiting dogs leapt up and circled round with deafening barks. Points of light speckled the darkness of the drive, where our various boys were squatting beside their hurricane lamps, waiting to escort us home along roads where snakes might lurk. Greetings and inquiries were exchanged, a little gossip, a grumble at the choice of hymns, then preceded by a bobbing light, one by one the congregation melted away into the darkness.

There is now, I hear, a little Anglican church in Taunggyi, the harvest of many offertories given faithfully Sunday after Sunday.

On the further side of the 'maidan', the field where polo and football were played, stood the red brick Roman Catholic church. Half a dozen times a year a Catholic priest visited Taunggyi. Father Hervé, a French Franciscan was an apostolic figure, with a white cassock, flowing beard, and a face which shone with humour and a shrewd saintliness. He never came to Taunggyi without visiting us, and over a glass of wine he and daddy dis-

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cussed politics. He always insisted that we children should sing the French nursery rhymes we had been taught by our governess. Three small figures with tight plaits and starched pinafores would stand in a row, and with appropriate gestures chant 'Savez-vous planter les choux?' and 'Sur le pont d'Avignon'. Our French accent must have wrung his heart, but he never indicated it, and always thanked and praised us with a seriousness which we greatly appreciated. Father Hervé died of cholera a few years ago in Burma. God rest his soul.

When he was in Taunggyi we always went to Mass and Benediction in his church. I loved the services and thought the ugly little building the acme of beauty. Everything seemed so real and understandable, the statues of Our Lady and St. Joseph, the Stations of the Cross round the walls and the little Lourdes shrine in the garden. The rather tawdry blue Sanctuary ceiling painted with yellow stars was to me veritably the floor of Heaven,

thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.

The congregation too was so very different from the respectable 'all-white' congregation at the Circuit House. It was composed chiefly of Anglo-Indians with some Indians and Burmans, and they genuflected, crossed themselves, lit candles and made their confessions with an unselfconsciousness which we found most exotic and exciting.

I remember so vividly the Good Friday services in the Catholic church. In the heat of the afternoon little groups of people drifted across the maidan, towards the church; Anglo-Indian papas in vociferous boots, fat mammas, pretty little girls with black ribbons run through their pinafores, and all the Burmese and Indian Catholics in full strength. The Stations of the Cross were read; if the priest were absent, a senior member of the congregation led the service. Looking back on it, there was something very touching about that service read so conscientiously by some diffident soul, who stumbled through difficult passages, mopping the perspiration from his face and neck. Between each station a verse of the *Stabat Mater* rose in faltering and uncertain tune.

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O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater Unigeniti!

Year after year when Good Friday returns, whether the spring sunshine warms the daffodils, or whether the east wind curls their petals, I can feel the blazing tropic sun pouring in through the open windows, while the pages of *The Garden of the Soul* turn limp in my sticky little grasp, and see brown faces, black faces, yellow faces, upturned to the Stations of the Cross, singing like children the beautiful, sorrowful words.

Of the Protestant sects the American Baptists were the first to arrive in Burma. In 1813 two young Americans, Adoniram and Ann Judson, landed in Rangoon and established the first Baptist Mission in Burma. They lived in loneliness, worked in danger, endured sickness and imprisonment. Their life in Burma is an epic of courage and endurance. Their first two babies died when a few weeks old; their third, Maria, was born while Adoniram was manacled in the dreaded torture chamber of the Burmese king. Ann, lovely in face and mind, died after eleven years work in Burma and with little Maria is buried in Amherst. They were saints and heroes, and to-day the American Baptist Missionary Society continues the work which the Judsons began.

I am glad to remember that I have spoken with a man, who, as a young missionary in Burma, had known Adoniram Judson in his old age. I was seven years old and, with mother, was on a visit to friends in Rangoon. One evening we drove over to Insein, a suburb of Rangoon, to have tea with two American Baptist missionaries, a Mr. and Mrs. Smith from Boston. Mr. Smith's father was the author of the American anthem, 'My Country, 'tis of Thee', and is mentioned in *The Professor of the Breakfast Table*. I remember the two missionaries very clearly, and the kind, white-bearded old man in particular, sitting on their veranda curtained with the purple-blue blossoms of morning glory; they hung above his head like a bridge spanning the years . . . A century before, in 1813, the Judsons had landed in a Rangoon how

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immeasurably different from the modern city I saw then. A wooden stockade, fifteen feet high, and inside it a collection of bamboo huts clustered around the base of the Golden Pagoda; an execution ground, where pigs rooted among the crucified and disembowelled victims of Burmese justice or injustice; behind, miles of rotting, malarious swamps, and jungles, the haunt of tigers. A hundred years later, of that scene only the Shwe Dagon pagoda remained as Judson had seen it — a thing of beauty, ever old, ever new, always memorable. In Judson's time, its exquisite spire had redeemed from utter squalidity the filthy town beneath it; so, when I saw it, it lifted Rangoon into something higher than a prosperous commercial city, and made it into an unforgettable shrine.

In Taunggyi an American doctor and his wife were in charge of the Baptist Mission. Dr. Henderson had a dispensary and also superintended the large Baptist school, while Mrs. Henderson helped to teach the girls, ran mothers' meetings, and with her husband conducted open-air services. She was a sweet-faced and sweet-natured woman. We children loved her dearly and however busy she was, we were always sure of a welcome, one of her 'crullers', a particularly delicious American cake, and permission to play the pianola in their drawing-room. My music lessons at home were affairs of tears and sighs and rapped knuckles, and I had no uncertain opinion upon the rival merits of piano and pianola. Every Christmas they gave a party for the children of their converts. A huge Christmas tree was set up in the centre of the Baptist school, its topmost branches nearly touching the ceiling, bright with candles and glass balls. The room was thronged with little brown children, each of whom received an orange, a bag of popcorn, and a doll whose clothes had been made by Mrs. Henderson's tireless fingers. Though we were neither brown nor Baptist we were never forgotten by the Hendersons, and a present for each of us was always concealed somewhere among the pine needles.

Such fervent Baptists as the Hendersons could not but disapprove of our Papist tendencies. I remember one tea party at their

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house, when Dr. Henderson requested me 'to ask for a blessing on our food', and I promptly gabbled off the ancient Latin grace which my father had taught us, *Benedictus Benedicat*. Considerably startled by the brevity of my petition Dr. Henderson asked me whether I could translate my grace, and shook his head when I replied that I couldn't. I was never again asked to say grace, but was on several occasions afterwards, considerably embarrassed by being prayed over before the meal began.

They were devoted missionaries, and in addition to their school and medical work in Taunggyi they lost no opportunity of evangelistic work. I have a vivid recollection of one of their missionary meetings. We were travelling with them to a place called Pindaya, about thirty miles from Taunggyi, where we were all going to spend Christmas together. We stopped one night at the small town of Pwehla, where the Hendersons gave a magic lantern picture of the Life of Christ. The villagers crowded into the barnlike room and gazed with curious faces at the screen. From an artistic point of view the pictures were deplorable, but they were clear and brightly coloured. Dr. Henderson worked the lantern and he and his wife took turns in telling the Gospel story. There was an apostolic quality about that meeting, something that dimly recalled the Church's early days. Many years later, I attended Mass in the Catacombs of St. Calixtus, and for one fleeting moment I remembered that December night at Pwehla. It might have been the dimly-lit walls, or the gazing faces around me; or perhaps the drawings of fishes, reeds and pelicans scratched on the Catacomb walls evoked submerged memories of the curtains in the Pwehla hut, embroidered with grotesque Burmese animals, and gently flapping in the night wind.

Another Baptist missionary, Mrs. Hancock was one of the 'characters' of Taunggyi. She and her husband had come out to Burma when they were a young married couple. Mr. Hancock had long since died, and when his wife grew too frail for active work she settled down in a little house close to the Baptist Mission, and with a Burmese girl to look after her worked at a translation of the Bible into the Taungthu dialect. The kind old lady used

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to give us each a pinafore for a birthday present, all hand made, with exquisite stitchery and very 'tickly' lace. One of my earliest memories is being taken down to her house by the ayah, to thank her for one such birthday present, and being asked to sing her 'one of the pretty songs' we had been taught. Obediently I stood up, and clasping my hands in front of my starchy pinafore I sang, doubtless in the tuneless monotone which is all that I have ever been able to produce. The first verse of the song ran as follows:

Lazy sheep, pray tell me why
In the pleasant fields you lie,
Eating grass and daisies white,
From the morning to the night.

At the end of it, Mrs. Hancock thanked me, but remarked in gentle disapproval that when she was a little girl she never sang songs about 'Ladies' feet'.

Mr. Hancock was buried in Rangoon, and his widow wished to be buried beside him. To ensure that this should be done, she had had her coffin made and kept it under her bed, ready for her demise, but pending that occurrence she kept sheets and blankets and other household gear inside the coffin. Many a time have I passed her house and seen the coffin propped on its end in the garden being cleaned and polished while its contents were airing on a clothes line. And on Sunday mornings, the coffin was brought out from beneath the bed and placed in the garden; down the veranda steps hobbled Mrs. Hancock, and mounting the coffin, used it as a platform from which she preached the Word to a circle of believers and seekers.

She died; and for the last time her coffin was dragged out from beneath the bed, and her body laid inside. Dr. Henderson meanwhile was making arrangements for the coffin to be taken down to Rangoon for burial, and encountering difficulties at every turn. A lorry was required to take it down to the railhead at Thammakan, about thirty miles away, and not one of the native lorry owners would consent to take a corpse on his lorry. They declared that if it once became known no Burman would ever

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travel or send his goods by that lorry. Dr. Henderson was at his wit's end when a Chinese woman, one of Mrs. Hancock's converts, came to him and said that her husband had a lorry. He was a Buddhist, but at that time was out of Taunggyi, and if Dr. Henderson could find a driver she would let him use the lorry. Dr. Henderson himself undertook to drive it down to Thammakan, so in the darkness before sunrise the coffin was placed on the lorry and started on its journey to Rangoon. A few hours later, the lorry turned into the station entrance, and the first person Dr. Henderson saw was the owner himself, chatting to some friends on the platform. Foot hard down on the accelerator Dr. Henderson shot past him, and with goggling, incredulous eyes, the man watched his lorry disappear behind the railway sheds, where the coffin was unloaded and carried on to the train. So Mrs. Hancock's wish was fulfilled, and the gallant old lady, who feared neither death, nor the daily mute reminder of bodily corruption, slept beside her husband.

CHAPTER VI

MULE PATH AND RUBY MINE

IN January 1918 daddy, mother and I set off on a tour through the northern Shan states. Our 'jumping-off' place was Hsipaw, situated almost at the terminus of the Northern Shan States railway and three days rail journey from Taunggyi.

We left our house very early; before sunrise the lorry ground up the drive and stopped with a stutter in front of the veranda steps. While the luggage was being put on, our dogs sniffed suspiciously at the driver's ankles, and curiously at the wheels, and the cats lay down under the back axle and blinked sleepily, indifferent to the bustle. Frost glittered lightly on the blades of grass, and we were glad to wrap ourselves up against the keen air. After several despondent whines the engine started, and as we turned out of the gate, the sun rose over the Crag, and the sky was streaked with level amber light. We drove down the main road, where the shops were being opened, past the bazaar in which the villagers from the surrounding countryside were already spreading out their baskets of papayas, oranges and rice, their trays of salt and juggery and chillies. For a couple of miles the road ran straight along the ledge in the mountainside on which Taunggyi is spread, past farms and villages, clumps of bamboo and stray pagodas. Then without warning the road doubled back on itself in a sharp hairpin bend, which the lorry could not circumvent without a couple of reverses, and for three miles we zigzagged down the mountainside, from the Taunggyi plateau to the Yaungwhe plain, a thousand feet below. We heaved a sigh of relief when we had rounded the last bend, and saw the road stretching ahead in a straight macadam ribbon across the plain. For in those early days of motors it was by no means unusual for the brakes to fail, and then it was a choice of either going over the drop on the right hand, or else ramming the rocks on the left hand. More often than not, the native drivers switched off the petrol at Hairpin Bend, and coasted down to the Heho plain, at a speed which was

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not rendered less terrifying to us by the driver's carefree enjoyment of the view. Once down in the plain, we rattled along at the dizzy speed of fifteen miles an hour, overtaking creaking bullock-carts, and leaving them toiling behind us in a cloud of white dust. On either side the land stretched away in an endless vista of rice fields, dotted by buffaloes and farmers. On higher ground the rice fields gave place to rolling, grass-covered downs. All this region, from the foot of the Taunggyi plateau for a distance of about forty miles, is known as the Myelat, or Middle Land between Burma proper and the Shan states.

After three or four hours driving we reached Thammakan. On the outskirts of the town we passed the camp of Turkish prisoners of war, who were employed in extending the railway between Thammakan and Heho. At the station we found our servants waiting for us. We had sent them on ahead with our heavy camp baggage and stores, and there they were on the platform surrounded by our luggage, and regarding the train with a mixture of apprehension and excitement.

The train journey lasted three days. Restaurant cars and station buffets were non-existent and we had to provide ourselves with enough food for the journey. Mother had a luncheon basket holding kettle, spirit stove and all the usual picnic paraphernalia, and how many thousand miles that basket must have travelled and how many hundred cups of tea it must have provided I dare not guess. It was a tedious journey. During the first day we crept down from the cool Shan plateau into the baking Thazi plain; the night was spent in Thazi waiting-room, where our efforts at slumber were disturbed by the perpetual shunting of trains, and the screams and chatter of the 'coolie' women porters. On the following day we got into the Hsipaw train and climbed up, slowly, but thankfully out of Thazi plain into the heights of the northern Shan hills.

The next two days were spent in the same carriage, and though, by this time, we were several thousand feet above sea-level, the days were unbearably hot, and the eyes ached from the glare outside. We halted at Maymyo, the summer headquarters of the

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Burma Government, lying at an altitude of 3500 feet, green with pine and bamboo. Beyond Maymyo the line climbed steadily upwards between peaks some of which must have been over 7000 feet high.

For hour after hour the train pounded along, halting for a moment at small stations to pick up an occasional passenger. Every three or four hours a longer halt was made to water the engine from huge galvanized tanks set on lattice towers beside the permanent way; a canvas tube like a monstrous elephant trunk conveyed the water from the tanks to the engine, and whenever the gurgle of water indicated a long halt the thirsty third class passengers poured out of their crowded compartments and running towards the engine bathed their feet, hands and faces, and drank the water that spurted from leaks in the canvas tube. Meanwhile we walked up and down the railway track, stretching our cramped legs, and admiring the magnificent hills that hung around us. Rocky slopes towered above, dwarfing engines and human affairs into insignificance, and throwing back the engine's shrill whistle in disdainful echoes. The lower slopes of the mountains were bright with 'flame of the forest' trees; the vermilion blossoms flaunted their splendour across valleys and ravines, and where the mountains fell away and opened out a vista of blue range upon distant range, faint and far among the purple shadows, the red flowers flickered like restless candle flames. An artist or a poet conceived that name; its aptness broke upon us one evening as the train panted through the gorges. Along the curves of the mountainside fronting the track a few scattered flame trees glowed among the green vegetation, like a broken thread of fire. Then as the train clattered round the flank of the hill, we saw this thin and creeping flame burst into conflagration, and roar up the hillside in a sheet of tossing fire. But it was a flame which did not devour, and the red glow in the sky was cast by the torches of the setting sun, and not by the funeral pyre of a forest.

The Gokteik viaduct, one of the famous viaducts of the world left an unforgettable impression on my mind. About a hundred miles beyond Maymyo the mountain ranges are split to a depth

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of thousands of feet by the Gokteik gorge. On a natural bridge of rock hundreds of feet above the stream which flows along the foot of the gorge, a steel viaduct three hundred feet high has been constructed. As the train crawled up the zigzag track towards it the slender towering bridge looked too gossamer light to bear our weight, and to cross it gives one a momentary kinship with the birds who poise between mountain heights.

Beyond the Gokteik gorge the line began its slow descent into Hsipaw, which, among the high lands surrounding it lies a mere thousand feet above sea-level, and is hot and humid. Late in the afternoon of our third day in the train we arrived at Hsipaw, and leaving our boys to collect the luggage walked across to the resthouse. It was a very superior resthouse, of red brick, with corrugated iron roof, and taps in the bathroom. But either Hsipaw at that time had no waterworks or else the pipes were not working, for the only thing that came out of those taps was a flatulent gurgle.

Several weeks earlier we had written to the sawbwa of Hsipaw asking him to provide horses and pack mules for us. When we arrived, the resthouse compound was an inferno of horsiness and mulishness, and it was a lengthy business to inspect these animals and pick out the best. Some were lame, some galled, and many had to be rejected, to the great indignation of the owners who protested that their animals were of superlative health and endurance, and cheap at the price. One of the owners was a man whose persistence was deserving of a better cause. He was an ancient, pock-marked scoundrel whose blackened teeth chewed perpetually at betel. His two mules were quite unfit for a long tour; one was as ancient as its master and the other had a deep sore on its belly. He implored, we refused, he expostulated, we were adamant. Eventually with a defeated air he clapped on his huge, flapping straw hat and prodded his mules out of the compound. Half an hour later a dandyish young man drove a couple of mules up to the resthouse and informed us that he had two very fine mules for hire. A glance at the animals was enough; one had the drooping neck and shaking flanks of extreme senility; the other a

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sore on its belly. The young man was advised to go back and tell his father that he had taken a sporting chance but it had not come off.

We were not greatly impressed by Hsipaw. It was an unattractive little town, very hot and dusty, and trying its hardest to appear progressive. We little thought, as we saw the infrequent trains fuss past the resthouse compound, that, years later, this same railway track was to become front-page news in the Press of several nations; that munitions of war for China would go up it towards Lashio and the ill-omened 'Burma Road'; that it would be bombed and shelled and finally captured by a victorious Japanese army. Lashio, a few miles beyond Hsipaw, is the end of the railway, and the beginning of what we then called the China Road. One of the world's old roads. For hundreds of years it has seen trade and travel and war. Marco Polo may have come down it when the Chinese attacked Burma at the end of the thirteenth century. Six hundred years later, Chinese were still passing along that road, bringing into Hsipaw ginger, onions, opium and jade, and taking back tea, raw cotton and manufactured goods. We saw Indians and Burmans come in from the road, and Shans with their flapping grass hats, and mingling with them, and in contrast making them appear almost sophisticated, were the unkempt figures of Kachins who live among the tangle of mountains that stretch from the frontiers of Burma into Tibet. They were short, thick-set hill folk, many of them good looking in a barbaric fashion. The women wore red or blue knee length smocks, and their calves were covered with striped leggings as a protection against leeches. Their thick hair was cut in a fringe which grew so long that it fell over their eyes, giving them the appearance of untamed Exmoor ponies. They had walked into Hsipaw straight out of their mountain labyrinths and ancient migrations, and as if twentieth-century civilization did not exist.

In the evening we paid a visit to the haw, where the sawbwa and his mahadevi greeted us with ceremonial politeness. The Hsipaw sawbwa is one of the most important sawbwes in the Shan states. He was, when we met him, an elderly man, and as

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a boy had been a page in King Theebaw's court at Mandalay. He had visited England, and in excellent English he described his impressions of the Delhi Durbar. His son had just left the Shan Chiefs' School, and was then in England studying law; he succeeded his father as sawbwa and died a short while ago.

The mahadevi showed us the weaving sheds where the women of the haw wove much of the cloth used for their dresses and the palace hangings. All the looms were set up, shuttles were clacking, healds tapping, and from a tenuous mesh of stretched threads, the cloth grew, gleaming silk and honest cotton.

When we left, the sawbwa gave me a little dah, which I still treasure. The curved blade is about six inches long, the ivory handle is carved with scrolls and foliage, and the silver scabbard is decorated with designs in fine silver wire. As he shook hands with my father, he told him that he had sent forward messengers to the sawbwas of the states through which we would pass, telling them to expect us, and also mentioned that he was putting two of his Ahmudans at our disposal.

On the following day, we shook the copious dust of Hsipaw from our feet, and set our faces towards the hills. Our ultimate destination was Mogok of the ruby mines, and the route we had chosen went in Roman fashion, across the mountain ridges, uncompromisingly up and down. Two states, Tawngpeng and Mong-Mit, lay between us and Mogok, wild and only partially surveyed country, impassable to any form of wheeled traffic. My father, mother and I, and the servants rode on Shan ponies, so short that daddy's legs dangled nearly to the ground. We rode ahead, then came the servants and behind them in a long line followed the mules and muleteers. The latter seldom rode, but walked or ran beside their animals prodding them with bamboo canes and shouting at them and to each other.

The first night out from Hsipaw we slept in a wooden rest-house clinging to the steep slopes of a hillside. A fence enclosed the house, but the jungle had invaded the compound, had thrown its creepers over the rails, and sent them crawling stealthily towards the house, which seemed to shrink back, tiny and de-

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fenceless against the inevitability of the forest. I woke very early the next morning, before dawn, when the blackness of the hill-sides showed but faintly against the lesser blackness of the sky. The quiet of the night was broken by a hundred small sounds, the whisper of trees, the distant trickle of water, the stamp and squeal of a mule, a peacock's harsh scream, and the bark of a deer.

These forests were the haunt of peacocks. Their bright plumage was often seen slipping through the bushes, and frequently a turn of the road would catch one unawares, preening his tail as self-consciously as any debutante before a mirror. The Shans believe that their feathers bring good luck, the very reverse of our superstition, and every sawbwa has his peacock feather fan, and bunches of them lean against the corners of his haw.

Where the borders of Hsipaw state march with Tawngpeng state, we halted one evening at a tiny village tucked into a corner of the hills. The zayat had only recently been built, and smelt deliciously of green bamboo. The whole village turned out to watch our arrival and squatted down in front of the zayat prepared for an evening's free entertainment. The headman came to pay his respects to my father, and by the time the usual greetings had been exchanged and arrangements made for buying fodder, it was getting late, so daddy rose and terminated the interview in the customary Burmese fashion, 'You have my leave to go'. The headman went, and gradually the other men followed him, but the women stayed. They had seen the bath off-loaded from the mules, and were now determined that they would see us bathe. In vain we told them they must go, that we were tired and wanted our food, and so on; they sat and waited patiently, and when at last I went off to have my bath in the little lean-to which had been built on to the zayat for our especial benefit, they had their reward. The walls of the bathroom consisted of a few upright bamboo poles driven into the ground, to which banana and bamboo leaves had been lashed. All the time I was bathing I was aware of many rustlings and suppressed giggles from the other side, and knew that the women were achieving their heart's desire. I only hope that the peep-show was worth the long wait.

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The country between Hsipaw and Tawngpeng was wilder and more rugged than any we had previously seen in the Shan states. Mountains surrounded us the whole time; the path slid down their flanks, wound along old river beds in the valleys, panted upwards again and edged its way round boulders and jutting precipitous crags. Thick jungle pressed upon us; the buttressed trunks of huge trees were strangled with creepers, and looking upwards through festoons of lacy green we caught the gleam of bright orchids and fungi. As we went north-west out of Hsipaw state into Tawngpeng we climbed ever higher. In the gullies and valleys we still found dense tropical forests of teak and bamboo, but along the ridges and in the colder air of the mountain tops we breathed the scent of pine. On the hill slopes below the pine level, but where the dense forest began to grow more sparsely, we came upon tea plantations, row upon row of prim little bushes which, after the unapproachable majesty of the jungle, struck a homely note. Most of the tea that is drunk in Burma and the Shan states is grown in this district. The tea shrub does not flourish among pine forest, but the young plant requires shade and so plantations are cut on the fringes of the thick jungle where the bushes can be shaded but not obliterated. Every turn of the climbing path reveals glimpses of hillsides where, amid haphazard rows of olivine shrubs, a peacock trails his green and golden plumage; or in a cleared space where some of the bushes have died, the leaves are spread out on bamboo mats to dry in the sun. Tea is the principal crop of Tawngpeng state, and mule caravans come and go over the mountain tracks, bringing rice into Tawngpeng state, and carrying away baskets of tea for Burma, the other Shan states and nearer China.

Stevenson thought that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive. Certainly, to travel as we travelled, unhurriedly and in holiday mood is good, and although the sun was hot and the way was rough, I have none but happy memories of the actual journeying, alternately riding and walking. But how surpassingly good it is to arrive at the halting place. After the glare of the sun, the

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zayat beckons with caressing shade, and the smell of freshly cut bamboo poles and leaves is so green and cool. The first drink of water, or better still of coconut milk, bubbling direct into the mouth from the shell of the coconut, which five minutes before was growing on the palm. The mules are off-loaded, and turned loose to graze; the baggage is carried in, the camp furniture opened; riding boots are kicked off and bare toes wiggled luxuriously. Then there is rest for everyone, until the westering sun has lost its power.

If there is no ceremonial visit to pay we go for a stroll through the village, or down to the stream, which here, as all over the world, is the centre of village life in the evening. Down every path come the women and girls, striding superbly, with water pots on their heads. Naked children run alongside their mothers trying to balance their own small jars. They gather round the well, or on the banks of the stream, and amid chatter and laughter fill their pots, or wrapping an old skirt beneath their armpits take an open-air bath. When we come in sight, the lifting voices and laughter cease abruptly, until the sudden silence is broken by a terrified yell from the children. In a few moments all shyness is forgotten and they are crowding round in curiosity and delight. 'Oh! Hung-li! Hung-li!' Beautiful! Beautiful! they murmur, awestruck, as they stroke our arms, and find that the white colouring does not come off.

These small villages were never dull, and to anyone with interest, a little knowledge and the collector's instinct, they provided infinite possibilities. My father was making a collection of Shan dahs with carved ivory handles, and we were always on the look-out for them as we prowled round the villages. We experienced all the thrill, without any of the bloodthirstiness, of a hunter, when we saw beneath a grimy Shan jacket, the projecting tip of an ivory handle. Some of those dahs are now in the Indian Museum at South Kensington, and, though in their glass cases they have lost the warmth of life and usage, the beauty of the carving still calls for admiration. And other things, beside dahs, we found in those villages. In our drawing-room we have two

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hand-beaten copper bowls, which, on winter nights, gloriously reflect the glow of the fire. We found the first in a Chinese muleteers' camp at the Meung-Keung festival. It was dingy and blackened, and considered only fit for the camp dogs, who were wolfing rice and bones out of it. From countless layers of dirt and tarnish the warm copper gradually emerged, its surface stippled with the marks left by the hammer. Its pair was found again in a camp of Chinese muleteers, but this time on the outskirts of a Tawngpeng village; a little smaller than the original, but identical in shape and workmanship. In their pride of place and polish they have now forgotten their humble origin.

And if all else failed, the village looms could always impart that satisfaction, that sense of fulfilment, which is peculiar to weaving. A flick of the wrist, a shuttle flies between a tangle of threads, and cloth is there. In most of the Shan villages the women still wove the cloth for their dresses, mats and hangings. The cotton is grown in a rather haphazard fashion on hillside clearings, often mixed up with other crops. The methods by which the raw cotton is cleaned, dyed and spun are slow and laborious, the looms are very primitive, and yet the cloth which results is beautiful and durable, and often extremely intricate in its many-coloured designs. I still have a cushion cover made from a length of cotton which we bought in a village in Tawngpeng state. We stopped to watch a woman at her loom, on which a maze of threads slowly grew before our eyes into a strip of red and black cloth. We asked her whether she had any finished lengths, and from the back of the hut she fetched this cloth which we bought for a few rupees. It is woven in alternate bands of black and scarlet with an occasional white and yellow stripe. After more than twenty years that cotton is only just beginning to show signs of wear, a tribute to the honest and patient toil of that Tawngpeng woman.

But the sun has set, and it is time to leave the village and return to the zayat. Baths, then supper of curry and rice, which, incredible though it may sound to a civilized diner, did not 'lây heavy on the stummick'. When supper is over, one of us reads aloud to the rest. One paraffin lamp casts an indifferent light,

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and we find it less trying to the eyes for each of us to take it in turns to read. *Cranford*, *Treasure Island*, *Marmion*, *Lorna Doone*, I first made your acquaintance in those shadowy zayats when the night closed round us, and mice and geckos scurried through the thatch.

One evening we camped in a zayat which had been built close beside a pagoda and its neighbouring poongyi-kyaung. That night, when darkness fell, we heard a grave and austere chanting. At about the same hour as Catholic religious communities are singing compline, the poongyis assemble before the image of Buddha and raise their evening chant. Since that night I have often wondered if the resemblance between Buddhist religious music and Gregorian chant is not merely fortuitous, but whether, at some distant time and in some far place, the music sprang from a common stock. It is not impossible. In the past many links bound together the Near and Far East. The art of Mesopotamia and of Ajanta are very probably allied, and music, like thought, travels lighter and travels farther than pictorial art. Not the grave cadences of *Te Lucis Ante Terminum*, loveliest of all evening hymns, held us silent that night, but — what was it, that chant that lifted through the darkness? A hymn of praise, a meditation, a prayer for quiet sleep? What? I shall never know, but the memory of that night and that grave music will always remain, flawless, irrevocably mine, unearthly, and set for ever amid the serenity of the stars.

The days slipped gently past, alike in routine, but so different in their manifold variety of scene and incident. My pony and I had soon become friends. He was a lovable little animal with soft eyes, gentle manners and iron mouth. Every morning found him as frisky as a tap-dancer, and eager for the sugar he soon learnt to expect from me. If, by any chance, I mounted him without giving him the sugar, he would stand stock still for a few moments, then turn his head, take the toe of my riding boot between his teeth and gently shake it. Once he had got the sugar, off he went, prancing and shaking the fidgets out of his legs. He was very sure-footed and, when the path slid down a precipitous hillside, I soon

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discovered it was better to give him his head, and let him pick his own way daintily between boulders and loose stones. He had one harrowing habit to which I could never reconcile myself; he liked nothing better than to walk on the extreme edge of a precipice, and would prance along, tossing his mane, and nickering gaily, while my appalled gaze lost itself in the distant depths dropping away immediately below my stirrup.

One day, a turn in the path showed us a black mass lying a little ahead. As we came up to it we saw a pack-bullock which, I suppose, from sickness or old age, had fallen by the wayside, and been left by his owners to die. This callousness is partly unthinking cruelty, and partly the result of Buddhist theology. The Lord Buddha had said, 'Kill not any life at all', and so our servants and the muleteers passed by that bullock, with a shrug, blind to the appeal in those sunken eyes, dead to pity, reflecting that it had brought its doom upon itself by misdeeds in some former existence. A bullet from my father's revolver brought a quick release, but the morning's brightness was overshadowed by the memory of that motionless form. Until another twist of the path brought another sight, and left a happier memory. In the middle of the road we saw a magnificent peacock posturing through the steps of a wooing-dance. There was no peahen in sight, so either she was watching her suitor from the coverts, or else he was practising his steps for some future occasion. He advanced and retreated and paused, while his superb plumage alternately swept the ground and opened fan-wise to display, on a background of iridescent blue and green, the golden markings like watchful eyes.

Thou art not thrall of sleep,
Embodiment of sight. . . .

Unperturbed by our approach, he finished his dance, then, closing his fan, Phra of the hundred eyes strutted off among the bushes.

About a week after leaving Hsipaw we arrived at Nam-San, the capital of Tawngpeng state. The first glimpse of it is charming; like Rome it is built on hills, and the thatched houses creep over

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the slopes, and sprawl untidily round the sawbwa's haw which stands high above the rest of the town.

After the sophistication of the Hsipaw sawbwa the simplicity of the Tawngpeng ruler was refreshing. His haw was a larger edition of the bamboo houses of his subjects, and the same variety of reminiscent smells drifted up between the cracks of the palace flooring, as met us in every farmer's hut. The wives of the sawbwa were chiefly Palaung women and wore the distinctive tribal dress. Tawngpeng state is the home of the Palaungs, one of the many tribes scattered through the Shan states. The men wear the Shan costume of turban, loose coat and excessively baggy trousers, whose seat is so capacious that it nearly sweeps the ground. The Palaung women's costume is the most striking of the many distinctive costumes found in the Shan states. It consists of a short skirt and loose 'jumper' woven in strips of blue, black, red and white. On the head they wear a witch-like hood of different colours, which sticks out in a point at the back and falls below the shoulders. Numerous varnished bamboo hoops encircle the waist; silver and gold bangles adorn the wrists and ankles, the ears are weighted down with heavy earrings, and necklaces, plaques and torques adorn their necks. When working in the fields the women discard both their jewellery and the encumbering hood, and instead, twisted round the head, they wear a vivid scarf adorned with shells and seeds, and in place of silver anklets they wear leggings as a protection against thorns and leeches. The full dress as worn by the Namsan mahadevi, is most picturesque, and the Palaung women catch the eye, even among the thousand bright colours of a Shan market or festival.

To compensate, perhaps, for their inconspicuous clothes the Palaung men smoke curious and beautiful pipes. They are between ten and eighteen inches long, and have a slender tapering stem and shallow bowl. Both bowl and stem are usually mounted in silver and adorned with intricate patterns of silver wire. These pipes are handed down from father to son, and some of them are very old. The sawbwa was smoking one of them, and showed us two or three of them, mounted in heavy silver and elaborately

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ornamented. He smoked and spat and chewed, and altogether was most unregal in appearance; a cheerful, grubby old man, with an expression of humour and infinite cunning. His wives were extremely shy, and hardly spoke a word during the whole of our visit. They made a bizarre group, and the effect of something strange and barbaric was heightened by the dimly lighted audience hall, hung with faded tapestries and long silver-mounted ceremonial spears.

We spent three days in Namsan and then continued our journey towards Mong-Mit and Mogok, through country which became progressively less mountainous and less thickly forested. At about this stage of the tour we realized what was the matter with one of our Hsipaw guides. We had been puzzled by his behaviour; some days he was very gay and intelligent, on other days so sleepy and lethargic that it was a wonder he did not fall off his pony—Opium. As long as he was supplied with it he could perform his ‘official’ duties, but when stocks ran out he collapsed. Like Professor Dowden’s famous conception of Shakespeare’s art, he saw-sawed up and down, now ‘on the heights’, and now ‘in the depths’. When we reached Mogok he disappeared, and his place knew him no more. We left Mogok with another guide, leaving our de Quincey presumably in Mogok bazaar, wrapped in opaline visions.

One hot noon, after a hard morning’s going, we dropped down into a plain, and saw a river winding its placid way over a sandy bed. We approached it in single file, daddy leading. His pony stopped to drink at the river’s edge, and then with mother close behind on her pony, he began to ford the stream. My pony was very thirsty and while he gulped down mouthful after mouthful I watched the others going on ahead. Suddenly I saw dad’s horse stop in mid-stream, his legs gave one shiver, bent at the knees, and in a moment he was rolling over and over in the water. Dad had barely time to throw himself off. A shriek from mother and she too was standing in the shallow stream, watching the horses roll and splash. Helpless with laughter I began to cross, and suddenly realized that my pony was about to follow the example

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of the others. By dint of terrific kicks and pummelling I succeeded in getting to the other bank, where I hastily jumped off, but before I could loosen the girths he too had plunged into the water. Meanwhile our servants had rushed to the first culprits, and their horses had immediately seized the opportunity to have a bathe. The dappled water seemed full of joyously waving legs. All of us rode the remainder of that day's journey in wet saddles. Fortunately, the muleteers were able to restrain their mules, otherwise we should have had damp bedding that night, and damp stores for the rest of the tour.

Wild strawberries and salmon curry are inextricably mingled in my memory with one day's journey between Namsan and Mong-Mit. We came to a valley between high hills; so deep it was, so overshadowed by the surrounding heights that the sun's rays seemed to have spent their power before they penetrated the thick foliage, and flecked the ground with straying fingers of gold. All round was the whisper of water, of little springs bubbling from the hillside and flowing down into the valley. Beside one brook we found wild strawberries and white violets, pearled with dew, and cool as pearls. In that fresh green world it was difficult to believe that we were not in some English woodland, untouched by scorching suns, unvisited by monsoon rains, and

trod by no tropic feet.

An hour later we were in an open plain, where the sun burnt down upon the brown and crackling grass. We halted for lunch at a wayside zayat, and had salmon curry, and years after, a spoonful of salmon curry takes me back over thousands of miles, and I can see, through the shutterless zayat windows, one large and mushroom-shaped tree which threw the only patch of shade in a treeless plain.

Kyauk-lon-gyi is a small village halfway between Namsan and Mong-Mit. Its name means Big Round Stone, and the stone to which it refers lies on the outskirts of the village, a huge granite boulder rearing up in solitary immobility among the swaying grasses. Its hump stands about twenty feet above the ground,

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and its rounded sides discourage even the clutching fingers of the persistent creeper. The villagers reverence the Kyauk-lon-gyi, and in a small bamboo shrine beside the stone they place offerings to the Nats, or spirits of the rock. For in spite of their official Buddhist religion, Burmans and Shans and all the hill-tribes retain the old animistic beliefs which swayed the lives of their ancestors long before Gautama achieved enlightenment. They reverence the poongyis, send their sons to the monasteries, build pagodas and before the figure of Buddha meditate upon the Four Noble Truths, but in all the details of their daily lives it is the Nats rather than the Buddha who must primarily be considered and propitiated. Before every house there hangs a coconut to the honour of the household spirit; every resthouse, wayside well, bridge, and tall tree has its shrine to which periodical offerings of chickens, rice, fruit and water are made. Even the monasteries, strongholds of 'pure' Buddhism, have shrines to the local Nats, sometimes tucked away in a corner of the grounds, but not infrequently close to the pagoda itself, under the very gaze of the benevolent Buddha. If a disaster fall upon a man, if he is about to take a journey, or to marry a wife, before he tills his fields or buries his father he makes an offering to the Nats, to placate or consult them. Our servants never omitted to place an offering in the Nats' shrine beside the zayats. I remember one zayat, at which the boys went about their work with dismal faces, and told us that it was not a good place; the Nats there were evil; the next morning they packed with unusual promptitude and left with relief written all over their faces.

Why or when a roundabout had been placed in the compound of Kyauk-lon-gyi zayat we could not discover, but it was an unexpected sight as we rode through the gate. It was a clumsy affair, consisting of a horizontal wheel revolving reluctantly on an upright post. I perched myself on one of the spokes, and the two Ahmudans spun the wheel, until my head grew dizzy and I nearly fell off. Then the servants came out and took it in turns to give each other rides, roaring with laughter as they spun the wheel, and trying their hardest to make de Quincey fall off. With

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no success, however; in spite of his hazy eyes and trembling hands de Quincey kept his balance.

The next day we came to Mong-Mit. I have a very vivid recollection of the sawbwa's little son, and wife. A greater contrast to the shy wives of the Tawngpeng sawbwa could scarcely be imagined than the pretty and vivacious mahadevi of Mong-Mit. She was as plump as a partridge, and there was something French in her quick bright glances and expressive gestures. She was dressed in shimmering silk, her face was dusted with thanaka powder, frangipani blossoms were tucked into her sleek hair, and her ears, throat and fingers were ablaze with jewels. The son, Khun Ohn, was a comic little figure, as round as he was high, in costume and bearing a small replica of his father. Round his throat was a necklace which must have been worth thousands of pounds. It was a 'name necklace' and every letter of his name was made of different gems. The K was of emeralds, the H of moonstones, and the remaining letters of aquamarines, spinels, rubies, tourmaline and so on. The little boy was due to come to school in the following year, and daddy gravely advised the mahadevi not to send the necklace as well as Khun Ohn to Taunggyi. He became sawbwa of Mong-Mit, and I sometimes wonder whether his little son in turn carried a king's ransom round his neck, or whether instead he wore a stiff collar and butterfly tie.

The sawbwa himself had been educated on Western lines, and was one of the more progressive chiefs. He and his wife were Shans, but the state is composed of a mixed population of Shans, Burmans, Kachins and Palaungs. The old haw of Mong-Mit state figures in one of the Shan folk tales in which the sawbwa's daughter took a lover who was the King of the Snakes. During the day her lover was a serpent and lived in a hollow post of the palace, and at night he slid out of the post and gliding to the Princess' bedchamber, appeared to her in the form of a man. The old haw was burned down years ago, but legend says that the hollow post, twisted in the form of a serpent could be seen there as a proof of the truth of the story.

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Only two days journey separated Mong-Mit from Mogok. The evening before we arrived at Mogok we camped in a zayat beside a stream. The villagers had utilized this stream to pound their grain and constructed a pestle which was a combination of ingenuity, efficiency and simplicity. This pestle was shaped roughly like a long-handled spoon, and consisted of a wooden beam with a cup at one end; a stout peg was driven into the lower side of the other end; the beam was fulcrumed at the end nearest to the cup. It was placed athwart the stream in such a way that the waterfall flowed into the cup; when the cup was full the weight of water depressed it, at the same time tipping up the handle end of the beam. When the water had been emptied out of the cup the handle fell back into its original horizontal position bringing the wooden peg heavily down into a bowl full of grain. Day and night the steady pounding went on, as ceaselessly as the running water. The murmur of the stream, the splash of overflowing water, the dull thud of pestle on grain made a pleasant and rhythmical pattern of sound.

At Mogok we came back for five days into civilization. That is to say, the resthouse was built of brick instead of bamboo, and had a cement floor and corrugated iron roof. There were also macadam roads, an infrequent lorry, white faces, English speech and a club. It was then a tranquil little town, cupped among the hills at a height of four thousand feet, set amid pine and eucalyptus, and connected by a motor road with the Irrawaddy, sixty miles to the west. We met with much kindness in Mogok. We had not come equipped for social functions, but that was not accepted as an excuse, and invitations to lunch, dinner and the club were showered upon us.

We were in Mogok of the ruby mines. Wherever we went we were pursued by natives wanting to sell us gems. In the resthouse at all hours of the day, Loogale came to tell us that someone was outside with jewels for sale. He squats on the veranda steps, this pedlar of jewels, usually extremely dirty, very ragged and apparently destitute. From the folds of a turban, or from some obscure recess in the clothing, a dirty scrap of paper appears, is

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carefully unfolded to reveal a gem. Daddy examines it carefully, and if he thinks it worth it, haggling now begins. The owner demands a price three times higher than he expects to get, dad counters by offering a sum three times lower than he is prepared to give. The prices gradually converge. Sometimes with a gesture of despair, the owner wraps up the stone and disappears, to reappear in a couple of hours or the next morning, and eventually an agreement is reached and the stone is handed over.

Or more prosperous looking vendors visited us carrying their wares in little japanned cases or cigar boxes. Inside them, rolled up in the inevitable scrap of dirty paper were the gems, rubies, apatites, tourmalines. Very often the richer traders brought collections of gems, arranged usually on cotton wool in flat tin boxes; twenty or thirty spinels of every shade; a dozen tourmalines; four or five rubies. Sometimes of such a collection, one stone only was of any value, but how lovely they all were, whether precious or semi-precious, those drops of light and pure colour.

As far back as the fifteenth century the Burmese were mining for rubies in this district, and for hundreds of years the kings of Burma exercised a royal monopoly over the mines. The methods employed by the Burmans for extracting the rubies were very primitive, and they seldom worked one pit for a long period. As soon as they considered that one pit was finished, anything from five to twelve days, they dug another close by. This accounts for the numerous shallow quarries which abound in Mogok, most of them filled with water and many of them now joined together to form small lakes. When the British took over the monopoly of mining, the old native processes were replaced by scientific methods and up-to-date machinery. One morning we were taken round the mines. I have only hazy recollections of a stream of trolley cars carrying the ruby soil along the shallow quarries, to some kind of mill where the soil was washed and shaken and sieved. But I have a very clear memory of the swarms of coolies, some employed in picking out the gems from the pebbles and grit, others sitting before shallow trays, sorting out the stones according

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to size, and separating them into their different varieties. Every coolie wore a wire cage over his head to prevent him from concealing a stone in his mouth; in spite of this precaution and in spite of rigid supervision and strict searching after every shift, gems were stolen, and cases have been known where a coolie even swallowed a stone in order to carry it out of the mines. As well as rubies, spinels of all colours, sapphires, blue, white and yellow are found, apatites, peridots, tourmaline and aquamarine. In recent years, largely owing to the increasing manufacture of synthetic stones, the ruby mines fell on bad times, and closed down. A little mining by the natives is still carried on, sufficient to supply the steady demand from India, from the Burmese themselves, and until the war, from the Chinese, for gems of all kinds but especially for the true pigeon blood ruby.

We went often to the bazaar, the nearest approach to the Arabian Nights that I have ever seen, such a strange medley of merchandise was there displayed. Here an old woman sits, surrounded by her baskets, one holding rice, another ruby dust; this tray is filled with juggery, that with cinnamon spinels; here are a handful of sapphires, there are chillies whose red out-challenges the ruby's glow. On this dirty sheet of newspaper a scattering of peridots and aquamarines are almost hidden beneath a pile of ngapi, which scents the air for yards around. Ngapi is fish which has been dried and allowed to go rotten and is a delicacy much appreciated throughout Burma. It is prepared by being gutted, then buried for several weeks, and when it is considered sufficiently 'high' it is dug up and profitably sold. You know when you are passing a ngapi 'burial-ground'. We held our noses and snuffled like Puritans while we bargained for gems in the Mogok bazaar.

We tore ourselves away from Mogok before bankruptcy threatened. The mules and horses had been well rested, the servants had enjoyed such night life as Mogok offered, a new guide to replace de Quincey had been engaged, our boxes were full of jewels, and our purses were light. So early one morning before the mists over Mogok had dispersed we mounted our horses *en*

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route for Hsipaw, but not along the same road by which we had come. The mules moved off, we gathered up the reins. Then from the back of the resthouse appeared a ragged figure, extracting from the folds of his turban a dirty piece of paper. One look; the haggling this time could not be prolonged; in a few minutes daddy was poorer by many rupees, but he carried in his coat pocket the crown of all our purchases in Mogok, a royal pigeon blood ruby.

The journey back to Hsipaw was tranquil and uneventful, and for some reason or other I have blurred impressions of the greater part of it. I remember an attack of malaria which descended on me one day, so that I rode in a daze of shivering and headache; never had anything looked so welcome as the shack which was our *zayat* for that night. I was dosed with quinine and aspirin, slept for sixteen hours, and the next morning with the resilience of healthy youth I had thrown off the fever, and alternately rode and walked the twenty-mile stage to the next halting place.

Another memory is of the man-eating tiger. We had been warned at one village where we halted for the night, that a tiger who had killed several men was frequently seen on the road along which we were travelling the following day. Orders were given that all the mules, muleteers and servants were to keep close and not to straggle. But the new guide assured us that there was nothing to fear; did he not carry a gun? When he had been engaged at Mogok, dad had looked at his gun, an ancient flint-lock so red with rust that it would probably have burst if anyone had attempted to fire it. The next morning we set off, the guide leading the way, bravely dressed and very cock-a-hoop. At about ten o'clock we noticed that the guide was no longer in front, and then we caught sight of him among the mules, carefully keeping himself surrounded by animals and muleteers and obviously extremely scared. In reply to our question he admitted that this was the place where the tiger was said to lurk; would the Thakin graciously hurry past? A little later the thick jungle round us gave place to rolling country; the road stretched ahead open and clear, and in front of the caravan our Ahmudan walked, jaunty,

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foppish, and very devil-may-care, with his gun slung across his shoulder.

But the incident which I recall most vividly, one touched with strangeness and romance, was our encounter with a mule caravan loaded with Karen drums. There were fifteen or twenty mules, and each of them carried, slung on either flank, a couple of drums. Both from an anthropological and artistic standpoint these drums are exceedingly interesting. The Karens, of whom more anon, are a tribe living in the south-eastern corner of the Shan states, and these drums were made by them only. None of them have been made for at least 150 years, and the Karens guard them jealously, frequently burying them in order to preserve them within the country. Consequently they are most difficult to procure, and are eagerly sought after by collectors. There is one in the British Museum, one in the Indian Museum, one in the Artillery Museum at Woolwich, and a few in private collections. They are cylindrically shaped, and are cast in bronze, with a skill derived directly from the ancient Chinese, who were masters of the art of bronze-casting. The ornaments and designs on them are traditional, the most distinctive being the small figures of frogs, which crawl round the upper surface of the drums; the Karens say that the number and shape of these frogs indicate the age of the drum. So that mule caravan was an arresting sight, and a mournful one. Of those thirty or forty drums not a single one was undamaged. They had been so carelessly strapped on, and so roughly handled that every one was dented, smashed or twisted. The muleteers refused to tell us where they were going, appeared quite indifferent to the condition of the drums, and regretfully we watched some of the irreplaceable art and antiquity of Burma vanish among the trees.

CHAPTER VII

THE 'SAME' AND THE 'DIFFERENT'

LIKE most children I went through the phase of possessing an autograph album and relentlessly pushing it under everyone's nose with a request to write 'something original' in it. I treasure that album now, for it keeps fresh in my memory so many names and faces which otherwise the years might have dimmed. My persistence knew no bounds, and I very nearly succeeded in asking the Prince of Wales for his autograph. This was in 1922 when he was being entertained at Mandalay. Through all the rounds of garden parties, polo tournaments, official receptions, and so on, I dogged his footsteps with my album tucked under my arm. But there were always too many senior officials and Residents' wives between him and me and it was not until the evening of his departure that my chance came. A big open air show had been staged for his entertainment by all the sawbwas and lesser chieftains. It was a kind of non-stop revue, with native dancing, wrestling, mimic fights, plays, songs. I remember little of the various entertainments, for all the lesser spectacles were merged in the one grand spectacle, the crowd surging hither and thither under the bright lights; sawbwas in brilliant apparel, their silken and bejewelled wives, and splendid retainers, dark faces, white faces, English, Burmese, Indian, Shan, and over them all the night royal with stars. The crowds ebbed and flowed and there was always one massed throng in the heart of which moved the central figure. It was clearly impossible to attempt to approach him, so I had given up hope, and with Agnes, was drifting along from one pavilion to another. Suddenly I looked up and beside me was the Prince of Wales talking to a group of Burmese actors. Album at the ready I stood shivering with fright, but determined to ask him as soon as he had finished talking. There! Now for it! I moved forward and then a familiar voice behind me exclaimed, 'Hullo, what are you doing here?' and I saw the figure of our

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Resident resplendent in his white uniform complete with gold braid and sword. Meekly I indicated my purpose, and as meekly slunk away when he told me severely that I was not to dream of worrying the Prince as he had had enough of autograph albums.

So there is one signature that I have not got. But as I turn the pages I read other signatures and remember kind faces and warm hearts, faces of so many people who, in greater or less degree, contributed to the sum of happiness which I amassed in Taunggyi.

Looking back, I realize that I mentally divided our English acquaintances into two categories, those who lived in Taunggyi, and so were the 'same' as us, and those who came up on visits and were 'different'.

To us children, the appearances of the 'different' ones were events fraught with the utmost excitement. We never knew what fresh glimpses of strangeness and romance they might not bring up with them from Rangoon or Mandalay. The 'different' ones had electric light and telephones, and could eat ice cream whenever they liked, and if they needed to go to the dentist they had only to walk along to his house, whereas we had to go a day and a night in the train. And the Rangoon shops were the anterooms to Paradise. I had once, when I was six, seen in the shop windows there, wax models, and could not be persuaded that they were not really human and so for years I pictured Rangoon residents standing before the plate-glass gazing their fill at these dazzling beings.

Mr. Hunter-and-Mr. Bellars, we always bracketed them together, Professors in Rangoon University, were two 'different' ones, who were the first to open for us charmed casements on a magic world. Their abracadabra was a parcel which they brought up on their first visit, and presented to us children. When it was unwrapped, oh unforgettable moment; unforgettably; — the sight, and even more, the smell of that unknown and much read about fruit, English apples, lying green and shiny, in layers of sawdust. And after that boxes; round, oval, shiny boxes; be-ribboned; with pictured lids, and inside them chocolates, marzipan, Turkish delight. And we, hitherto — we had found in

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peanut toffee on bamboo sheets, or lumps of juggery wrapped in a banana leaf, the sum of all delight! Since that day a pretty chocolate box has never wholly lost its magic.

Another novelty in food to which we were introduced by a visitor from Rangoon were sausages. Not the festooned variety of English shops, but the skinless sort in tins. The occasion on which we first tasted them is imprinted indelibly on my mind, when Mr. Potter invited my two sisters and myself to dinner. He was an Inspector in the Indian Education Service, and used to come up periodically to inspect the schools in Taunggyi and the surrounding districts. We were invited to dine with him in the circuit house where he was staying. We dressed up for the event, in long skirts, with fans, and mother and our governess did up our hair in puffs and curls. Escorted by Kantu with his 'butti' or hurricane lamp, we stumbled up the road to the circuit house, very harassed by our skirts, which we held up bunchily around us, and trying as hard as we could to behave like grown-up ladies. But when we saw the wonderful dinner he had got ready for us, sardines, and sausages-out-of-tins, and trifle with cherries on top, and plates of assorted dessert, I fear we made pigs of ourselves.

How kind all those visitors were, how ready to amuse us and to answer our importunate questions. Mr. and Mrs. Ellaby; she so quiet voiced, he with a loud bellow which we soon discovered connoted nothing alarming. Their car was I think among the first we saw in Taunggyi, and many were the joy rides we had in it, hours of breathless wonder. He was a government chaplain and came up to Taunggyi three or four times a year on duty to hold services. He was most unconventional and caused us to suffer agonies of suppressed laughter in 'church'. They had a little dog called Jezebel who one Sunday followed her master into church, and came sniffing round his ankles during the sermon. He booted her away once, but she returned. Without pausing in his sermon he stooped, picked her up by the scruff of her neck and the base of her tail and strode to the back door of the circuit house. 'Durwan', he bellowed, and woke the echoes, and startled the old caretaker so much that he knocked over his hubble-bubble and

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arrived very hot and bothered. Mr. Ellaby threw Jezebel at him — 'Take her away, and shut her up' he ordered. 'Awful nuisance, dogs!' he growled at the congregation as he stalked back to his place and resumed his sermon.

Mrs. Ellaby was not strong, and sometimes prolonged her stay in Taunggyi after her husband had gone back to Rangoon, and usually she stayed with us. During one such visit Mary and I were about to be confirmed, and Mrs. Ellaby wrote down to her husband asking him to buy two copies of *The Christian Year* for a confirmation gift. In due course came his reply. He had not been able to find a copy of the book anywhere in Rangoon, and in any case the girls wouldn't want it, and instead he was sending up two spinel rings. I still wear my ring and both Mary and I have always had a very high opinion of Mr. Ellaby's taste in confirmation gifts.

Among our best loved visitors were the missionaries, who, between March and June, came up to the hills for a few weeks respite from the heat of Lower Burma. They were such a cheerful crowd, always full of fun and eager to extract every ounce of enjoyment from their holiday. With them we went for picnics and on sketching expeditions, organized impromptu concerts — largely Gilbert and Sullivan, and melodramatic sketches; walked miles, and what quantities of strawberries and cream vanished then. They had an enormous zest for life which even their hard work and the trying climate of Lower Burma failed to daunt.

When the brick walls of our house refused to expand any further, our visitors had to overflow into the garden. Huts, made in the native fashion, with mat walls, thatched roof and split bamboo floors were erected by our labourers. They were picturesque but primitive; the floors rocked when we walked across them, and there were no mod. cons. Nevertheless they were always in demand; indeed, most of our visitors preferred them to the more orthodox accommodation, finding in them a welcome change from city sophistication. Besides, there was always the possibility that something exciting might happen; once a snake fell down from the thatch on to the top of a mosquito net; sometimes a soft

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padding and snuffling indicated that a leopard was wandering round in search of titbits. And if a storm drove up, it was half pleasure, half terror to lie and listen to the roar of the wind outside, the rain beating upon the walls, the gurgle of the water beneath the open flooring. Which reminds me of the morning when Mr. Broadbent was having his bath in a hut, and there came a storm of wind which blew the hut down, leaving Mr. Broadbent in his bath. And the rain which followed flooded the ravine at the bottom of the garden to such a height that the ground bordering it was left glutinous with deposited mud, and Mrs. Broadbent, going down to the ravine, got stuck in the mud, and faint cries for help were wafted up to the house.

If Mrs. Broadbent had realized that we secretly classed her as 'different' I think she might have remarked that we had rather a Looking-Glass outlook. For she was somewhat nonplussed by the nonchalant way my sisters and I accepted the drunken Gurkha incident. One evening she, mother and we three were returning from a walk when we heard screams of terror, and a young Gurkha woman came running down the road towards us. After her came her husband as completely drunk as a Gurkha soldier can be. She was breathless with terror and running, and clung to mother and Mrs. Broadbent, circling round and round them, while he plunged after her trying to kick her in the stomach. Mother's protests in Hindustani and Mrs. Broadbent's English expostulations were equally unavailing, and when he began to handle his kukri the outlook did not appear rosy. However, the wife decided that she would have a better chance of survival if she stopped dodging in circles round us, and she suddenly broke loose from mother, and looking, with her magenta and orange and scarlet skirts, like a blown peony, made off in the direction of the police lines as hard as she could run, with her husband in pursuit. The last we saw of him was his disappearance into a ditch, so we hoped she managed to elude him. Both the grown-ups were a little unnerved by the episode, and considered inadequate my younger sister's remark that 'Gurkha soldiers often did that in Taunggyi!'

I have said that we regarded those who lived in Taunggyi as

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being the same as us, simply because they formed part of the familiar background of our life there. In reality, the white population of that small hill station was composed of as varied an assortment of types and personalities as is possible to find anywhere, and yet conforming to the pattern of every other British community in our Empire. At the apex was the Resident, and below him, in descending grades of seniority, were district commissioner, forestry officer, doctor, police magistrate and so forth. The hub of this community was the club.

Taunggyi club was a picturesque but rather dilapidated building. It was built of wood, with whitewashed mat walls, which housed innumerable white ants. Two crab-apple trees grew beside it, whose fruit bounced upon the corrugated iron roof, to the irritation of nervy members. The men's room held the bar, a billiard table, numerous masculine chairs and the *Pink 'Un*. The ladies' room contained the *Queen*, the *Tatler*, and other seemly journals. There was a card-room where whist and bridge were played, a library and a small store from which tinned cheese, Carlsbad plums, olives and biscuits could be obtained at a price. Every evening most of the inhabitants who were not on tour collected at the club to play tennis, billiards or bridge, to read the papers, drink 'pegs', exchange recipes, and choose library books. It is a trite comparison, but it really was 'as good as a play' to sit in a corner of the reading room, and watch the performers as they made their exits and their entrances. Each one left a little piece of his personality behind him, affecting everyone in the room in some degree, for better or for worse. There was the slim and distractingly pretty wife who trod on the heart of every male in Taunggyi. She came, a bride, with an exquisite trousseau and a mean and shallow nature. She never made a pretence of caring for her husband, who, night after night, walked round to our house to have a game of chess with daddy, rather than sit at home by himself. He died shortly after they had been transferred from Taunggyi, and if ever a woman broke her husband's heart, that girl did.

Her chocolate-box prettiness acted as a foil to the dark beauty

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of another wife who gave Taunggyi plenty to talk about. She was completely indifferent to her gaunt and taciturn husband, her little son, to social opinion, to everything in fact, except one man. I remember seeing her one night at a dinner party in her own house; with an almost superb effrontery she had seated her lover at her right hand; she had eyes and words for him alone, and an ill-concealed disdain for the rest of her guests. The fashion for evening dresses with shoulder straps had barely penetrated to Taunggyi, where they were still regarded as 'fast'. She wore a black gown, very *décolleté* with the narrowest of shoulder straps, and her beautiful shoulders and bosom seemed to flaunt their whiteness at the more modestly bodiced figures around. Young as I was, I could not but be aware of her challenging beauty, and of the passion that leapt between her and him. Her husband divorced her, and she married her lover. She was one of the most striking women I have ever seen, but she was not a public menace, and when she came in, the wives of Taunggyi club did not have to cast watchful glances at their husbands, as they did when the fluffy and brainless beauty was at large.

Taunggyi, however, could show some faithful wives, and husbands who were not cuckolds. Everyone smiled when 'Flossie-darling-and-Jackie-dear' walked hand in hand through the club gates; they were the most unashamedly devoted couple in the station. She as tall and fair as he was dark and short and fat, but both always wreathed in smiles of genuine good-nature and simple enjoyment of life. While studying in London, Jackie-dear had found lodgings in Streatham, where, in true novelette style, he fell in love with his landlady's daughter, wooed and won her, and brought her out to Taunggyi and with her the unmistakeable atmosphere of Streatham. Their drawing-room was littered with paper fans, pen painted d'oyleys, bead curtains and, if the aspidistra was lacking, it was only because it did not thrive in Taunggyi. In unexpected contrast with this suburbia, Flossie-darling-and-Jackie-dear favoured the most astonishing variety of pets. Besides numerous cats, dogs and horses they had a couple of parrots who made the veranda hideous with their screechings

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and droppings. In the drawing-room one was sure to trip over a tortoise, and in the back compound, one of the stables housed two huge monkeys who strained at their chains whenever they saw us, gibbering and grimacing with rage. Everyone hated these creatures and we were forbidden to go near them, but Flossie-darling looked on placidly while her two baby boys crawled round the monkeys, and chirpingly requested Jackie-dear to take a snap of the 'lovely group' they made.

Few things gave me keener enjoyment than a visit to the club. It was a very rare treat when we were small. Occasionally mother took us in, and we sat, like mice, in a corner, drank lemon-squash, ate potato-chips, and devoured every detail with our eyes and ears. One small incident, of many, has etched itself on my memory; we were in the reading-room one evening when someone walked in and said 'Kitchener's gone', and I was scared at the silence which fell upon the room, and at the dismay upon every face.

As I grew older I went more frequently, and my last two years in Taunggyi took on a different character from those preceding it.

After the war Mary had gone to school in England, and my younger sister Agnes had found a friend in the pretty little daughter of the police commandant. There was no one of my age in Taunggyi; instead I found a companion in mother. I only hope she recalls those two years when we did so much together with the gladness that I do. It was then that I finally emerged from the enclosure of home and nursery into the grown-up world which, until now, I had only glimpsed through the cracks of our bedroom door on dinner-party nights. I began to be included in mother's invitations, I was allowed to go to the club, to play tennis, and read the books and papers in the ladies' room. And when daddy and mother gave a dinner-party I no longer suffered the indignity of a nursery supper and early bed, but 'dressed' and stayed up to dinner, convincing proof that I was really growing up. Up till now, life had been made up of lessons and play, house and garden, governess and ayah, daddy and mother. Here a brave new world opened before me; eagerly I watched the characters that played

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their part in it; I learned that the twin axes on which this world revolved were the Residency and the club, and became aware of the ups and downs in Taunggyi's social life due so often to the vagaries of the First Lady or Gent in the land.

It is difficult for anyone who has not lived in the East to realize the significance of club and Residency on the life of a small station. A cheerful, friendly club is essential to the well-being of one of our further-flung outposts. To sit on the lawn with a 'peg' and a cigarette, talking with friends, by starlight, or flooding moonlight, or in the kind darkness, is better than the Pictures for taking your mind off your worries. As for the Resident he can make or mar a station. Happy the place which has a good Resident, and thrice blessed if the Resident's wife is pleasant and tactful. I am of the considered opinion that bachelor Residents are the most desirable. So many Residents' wives are like the little girl with the curl — horrid! Yet one Resident's wife in Taunggyi was so very, very good that when I remember her I am almost tempted to disown my preference for bachelor Residents. She was Mrs. Thornton, and she was kind and tactful and gentle-voiced, an excellent thing in woman. And then I remember Mr. Stirling our bachelor Resident for so many years, and reaffirm my preference.

He was not, by nature, a 'club man', but his position required that he should go there frequently, and I do not think there was anyone who was not pleased to see him come in. Everyone liked him, he was so honest and kindly, so apt in smoothing out the petty quarrels which are endemic in every Indian station. A certain shyness and simplicity in him endeared him to children. I recall the children's parties he used to give at the Residency, a large brick and wooden building, with dark rooms, beloved of rats and cockroaches. As befitting its importance, it stood in solitary dignity on the outskirts of Taunggyi; behind it the Crag leaned protectively, if slightly menacing; in front, the gardens fell away in terraces and parkland, an asylum for snakes. We went to the parties there, awed at first, and a little conscious of our best pinafores and sashes, but once inside the Residency all shyness was

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forgotten and we gorged wonderful cakes ordered from the Vienna café in Rangoon, and rapidly reduced the rooms to chaos in games of hide and seek and dressing up. A 'country gentleman' at heart, fond of all homely pursuits and pleasures, not least among them, gardening. The Residency garden in his time, was beautiful, especially in June when the Taunggyi lilies were in bloom, for he was particularly fond of these flowers. He died at sea not long after he retired from Burma, and I heard of his death with that peculiar sense of loss we feel at the passing of yet another of our childhood associations.

He was still Resident when, in 1915, occurred the Singapore Mutiny. Singapore was — then — a long way from Burma, but the ripples of the mutiny spread wide and broke upon our quiet lives. The story of the mutiny is a chapter in the larger story of the attempt made by Sikh revolutionaries to overthrow British rule in India. It was organized by a small band of anarchists, led by a Sikh called Har Dayal, and was encouraged and financed by Germany, for at least a year prior to the outbreak of War. In 1915 Sikh immigrants into Western America were recalled by Har Dayal to India in order to spread disaffection. At various ports of call on the homeward journey, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Penang and Singapore they endeavoured to stir up trouble, on the whole with little success. In Hong Kong an attempt by part of the troops to mutiny was immediately quelled; in Singapore the Sikh element in the Malay States Artillery mutinied; the revolt was crushed, but some of the mutineers escaped, and came overland through Indo-China and Siam. A few were captured as they crossed the Burma frontier, but a good many slipped by into the Shan states and proceeded to stir up discontent and insurrection against the British. Chiefs and government officials were told to be on the look-out for them and to be prepared for trouble. In Taunggyi, Mr. Stirling and my father, who was then commanding officer in the Indian Defence Force there, acted together in taking precautionary measures. It was decided that if need should arise, everyone in the station should gather at our house, as it was suitably built for defensive purposes and had a well in the grounds.

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The kitchen, servants' quarters, and other outhouses were to be pulled down, as affording cover for attackers. All firearms in the station were collected in our house, and my father was ordered to issue rifles only to members of the defence force. If insurrection had blazed up suddenly, we should have been prepared for it. Fortunately it did not, perhaps owing to the thoroughness of the precautions. Eventually most of the mutineers were rounded up in the states of Yutsauk and Yaungwhe and peace settled down once more upon the land. Looking back on that incident now one might be tempted to belittle its significance. But if Har Dayal had succeeded in his object of rousing all the Sikhs in India to co-ordinated mutiny our position there would have been in grave danger. We should have been obliged to maintain there a strong force of soldiers instead of being able to send them to the Western Front. That was what Germany wanted and what she had been working for in secret long before the outbreak of war. Those who are interested will find in Lieut.-Col. Irvine's book, *Land of No Regrets*, a full account of this abortive mutiny. He writes with authority for he was sessions judge in Lahore at the time, and president of the special tribunal set up to inquire into the conspiracy.

Adjoining the club was the Durbar Hall. The latter, as the name indicates — Durbar means an assembly — was the hall in which the sawbwas met to discuss state affairs with the Resident, or to welcome the Lieut.-Governor when he paid one of his rare visits to Taunggyi. It was a low wooden building, in semi-Burmese style, with a dais at one end, and open pillared sides, and when not being used for the original honourable functions was put to sundry purposes. It was used as a church, when the circuit house dining-room was not available, as a concert hall, or as a dormitory for a party of Boy Scouts on holiday from Rangoon. When not in use, it stood empty and I was frightened to go past it at night, it looked so gloomy and sinister. From time to time a scare would run round the station — 'The hamadryad has been seen' and then nothing would induce us to go past the Durbar Hall after dusk, and not during the day if it could be avoided. A

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hamadryad is one of the few snakes which is aggressive, and is given to attacking and sometimes pursuing the object of its displeasure. The Taunggyi hamadryads were snobs, for they seemed to favour either the Residency garden or the Durbar Hall, and I never heard of one being seen anywhere else. Very often I am sure, the scare was baseless; someone had seen a large snake in one of these places, and lo! it was at once a hamadryad. But a tradition like that dies hard and I should not be surprised to hear that even now, a hamadryad is still seen in the vicinity of the Residency or the Durbar Hall, and that the inhabitants of Taunggyi still make a detour to avoid an encounter.

Beside the Durbar Hall and in front of the club were the tennis courts, where the men, in tight flannels and flapping shirt sleeves (no shorts or sports shirts then) ran rapidly about the court, and the ladies in long white drill skirts, petersham belts, and panama hats ran a little less rapidly, and served underhand. After the war, a new and 'modern' set of officials gradually replaced the older ones; this younger set played a dashing game, which was looked upon with the utmost disapproval by the former tennis champions of Taunggyi. There was one young lady in particular who in a shockingly abbreviated skirt, half way up her calf, served overhand, smashed lobs, and at the net annihilated any trustful ball that wandered her way. Over her unladylike tennis the matrons of Taunggyi held an unofficial but very wrathful indignation meeting, but in vain. Post-war tennis had come to Taunggyi to stay.

The new tennis was symptomatic of other changes which the post-war years brought to Taunggyi. I dimly discerned it then, but looking back now can plainly recognize the beginning of a silent overthrow of old manners and institutions which took place more slowly there but no less inevitably than in the rest of the world.

The biggest change of all was in the very character of Taunggyi itself. It was ceasing to be 'out of the way', and was becoming a fashionable hot weather resort. The railway was partly responsible. When we had first come to Taunggyi, in 1906, the railhead had

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been 104 miles away. When we left in 1922, it was thirty miles away. Those of us who loved Taunggyi's isolation thought that too close. Now the railway has reached Taunggyi. But even more than the encroaching railway was the motor car responsible for breaking in upon the peace of our little hill station.

For years, bullock-carts, mules and horses had been the only means of transport. One or two people had pony-traps, or 'tum-tums' as they were called, but the rest walked. We walked to the club, to church, to the bazaar, and when they went out to dinner at night, the ladies put on stout shoes, picked up their trailing skirts, and walked behind the bobbing hurricane lamp, carrying their evening shoes in shoebags embroidered for them by dutiful daughters or leisured friends. Political officers rode or walked through their districts, and on their slow progress acquired a better understanding of the country and the people than they could have obtained by rushing through in a car. During the war, one or two cars made their appearance; by us children they were regarded with wonder and excitement, but by anyone who was forced to deal with them they were looked upon with the utmost dislike and suspicion. And justifiably so, for they stopped more often than they went. There was a puncture, or a leak, or as once happened to us, a hole was blown in the cylinder wall, or, for one of a hundred reasons, the car stuck on a hill, and the most promising joy-ride ended in a walk. The three-mile climb from the Heho plain to Taunggyi was a test which few of the early cars surmounted. Countless were the occasions when the passengers were told that they must get out and walk, while the car cooled down, and we had reached Hairpin Bend at the summit before we heard below us the anguished stutters of the car as it boiled upwards. It was a common sight to see a couple of bullocks hauling a car along the road. Yes, bullock-carts, though uncomfortable, were neither as bumpy nor even quite as smelly as the cars, and though they were slow they got there eventually.

After the war, more and more cars gradually came to Taunggyi, and by the time we left they were becoming such an everyday occurrence that very often we did not bother to run to the windows

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to watch one going past. Familiarity bred contempt even — *mirabile dictu* — in the bullocks. At first the mere sight and sound of a car used to send the bullocks into a trembling, plunging, unmanageable panic. A whole caravan of carts would swerve some to the right and some to the left, completely blocking the road, and it was with the utmost difficulty that the unfortunate drivers, almost as scared as the animals themselves, could tug them over to the grass verge, and hold them there while the offensive car crawled past. The surest indication that cars had come to stay was the placidity of a bullock-cart, which at the sound of a horn, drew into the side of the road, and the driver continued to sleep undisturbed as the car shot past.

We often watched such a tableau but did not appreciate its significance, namely, the acquiescence of the East in the gods of the West. Nor did we dream that those same cars were the vanguard of a host which would continue to crash through the land, growing ever 'bigger and better' — God save the mark! — until there appeared, in obscene culmination, that juggernaut which we have named the Tank.

This was, however, mercifully hidden from us twenty-five years ahead. But those who had eyes to see, could see, as they watched the cars pass the plodding bullocks in noise and dust, something else pass away from that high hill-crowned stage. Quietness. This was Taunggyi's balm, and great loss.

CHAPTER VIII

INLE

ABOUT ten miles from Taunggyi as the crow flies lies the Inle lake, a long, narrow strip of gleaming water, which can be clearly seen from the Crag. It is fed by the Nam Pilu river, which rising to the north of the lake runs through it, then flows southward until it disappears underground among the hills of Karenni. At the northern end of the lake is Yaungwhe, the capital of the state of that name.

Yaungwhe state has several claims to distinction. Not only is it one of the foremost and wealthiest of the Southern Shan States whose ruling family sent princesses to the Royal Court of Burma, but heaven has favoured the state with a special manifestation of approval, by bestowing upon it that rare phenomenon, a white crow. In addition, it boasts an ancient and most sacred statue of Buddha, and, to go from the sublime to the terrestrial, it has several hot springs bubbling up from the bowels of the earth.

One day we went for a picnic to Yaungwhe. We did not go by the macadam road from Taunggyi but followed the hill paths that drop sharply from the Taunggyi plateau into the low-lying Yaungwhe valley. We made an early start, and before ten o'clock we had left the hills and were crossing the valley, skirting the paddy farms where the young rice was thrusting its green spears above the flooded fields. Growing alongside, and often among the rice fields were pineapples, coconut palms, and groves of sugar cane. We rode and walked alternately, and our servants trotted ahead of us with the picnic baskets swaying from poles slung across their shoulders. Kantu was one broad grin, and even Maung Hsan appeared pleased. The walk meant nothing to them, and they welcomed this opportunity to see their relations in Yaungwhe, and to gain some merit by visiting the sacred white crow.

We halted by the wayside for a short rest, and by noon we had reached Yaungwhe resthouse. After lunch and a brief siesta we

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sallied forth, first to the old haw where the sawbwa had invited us to tea.

This was the usual ordeal of biscuits, syrupy tea and condensed milk. When it was over we were escorted round the haw, a big rambling building, raised on piles. Like most Burmese buildings it had only one floor, as a Burman dislikes other peoples' feet above his head. The outside pillars were of carved teak, and the tent-like roof, though made of corrugated iron, looked astonishingly delicate, with its fluted eaves, upcurved like spreading wings. The gables, fascia boards, balustrades and veranda posts carved in the traditional designs of animals, scrolls and flowers enhanced this effect of imponderability. Indoors, the rooms were a queer mixture of East and West; in design and decoration they were purely Burmese, wide low rooms opening one into another by doorways without any doors. In most of the rooms the round pillars supporting the roof were lacquered red below and gold above, but in the council chamber or Hall of Audience, the pillars were carved in shallow relief, and the patterns picked out in bits of brightly coloured glass. From a distance the effect was of a sparkling mosaic work, garish but with an unexpected charm. Though the glass was cheap the lines of the carving flowed in pure and exquisite curves. Burmese paintings hung side by side with German mirrors framed in plush, and with shiny oleographs of Queen Victoria's coronation. One picture was pointed out to us with especial pride by the sawbwa, who told us it had been in his family for several generations and that it depicted the founding of the Yaungwhe state. I have forgotten the details of the story, but the main theme was a giant who after terrorizing the people of Yaungwhe for a long time was attacked by the four sons of the reigning sawbwa. After a mighty struggle he was overpowered, and each prince getting hold of the limbs of the giant tore them from his body and cast them north, south, east and west. The trunk of the giant became, I believe, the Inle lake, and each limb became one of the streams that flow through the state. The dismembering scene was painted with gusto and in much sanguinary detail, and we children gazed at it in horrified fascination.

After we had been through the haw we were taken outside to see the white crow. The reverence which is accorded by the Burmans to a white elephant or a white crow springs from the belief that a future Buddha is incarnated in animals of such unusual colouring. In some future age, whether near, or removed by countless millions of aeons, the man whom they see now in the guise of a white crow or white elephant will attain Buddhahood, and in gratitude to his former worshippers will assist them in their upward journey towards Nirvana. So no honour can be too lavishly heaped upon such animals, and the man or community who possesses one is considered thrice blessed. This crow was housed in a large cage, about thirty feet square, filthy with accumulated droppings and very smelly. Men and women were gathered round the cage, gazing at the bird and shikoeing with closed palms. In spite of his royal white plumage, he was very shabby and bedraggled, and his lustreless eyes seemed to gaze out enviously over his worshippers at his brethren whose ordinary black plumage entitled them to the freedom of the sunlit trees and air. He was a depressing sight, and we were glad to leave him and wander through the bazaar until it was time to start the homeward journey. As we climbed the steep paths up to Taunggyi the cool breezes that brushed our faces were welcome after the heat of Yaungwhe.

The hot springs lay a few miles beyond Yaungwhe on the right bank of the Inle lake. The road to them was rutted, grass-covered and monotonous, but the springs themselves were pleasant, surrounded by overhanging trees which threw a welcome shade. Directly we arrived we would kick off our shoes and stockings and paddle in the tepid water, venturing closer and closer to the spot where the water gushed out of the rocks, until it became too hot to be borne. The temperature of the water where it sprang from the rocks was, I believe, nearly at boiling point; certainly it steamed and bubbles rose continually, but the sulphurous taste and smell were not too strong to be unpleasant.

Opposite the hot springs, but on the left bank of the lake was Fort Stedman, a reminder of the early days of the British occupa-

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tion of Burma. All that is left of it now are some grassy mounds in the English cemetery there.

The next time I visited Yaungwhe was for the annual festival, which is famous not only in the Shan states but in Burma as well. On a little island in the middle of the Inle lake there is a statue of the Buddha, so holy and so ancient that the hoariest greybeards of Yaungwhe say that it was old when their grandfathers were young. Every year this statue is brought by canoe across the lake to a special shrine erected for it in Yaungwhe, is kept there for a few days, and is then escorted with honour back to its island home.

On the morning of the festival we walked down to the lakeside. Boats jostled and pressed against each other so thickly that for a distance of about one hundred and twenty yards from the shore the surface of the lake was completely hidden. Along the bank a mass of excited laughing people dressed in festival clothes surged hither and thither. Sweetmeat sellers pushed their way through the throng; lepers and beggars solicited alms; pretty Burmese girls with sprays of the Burmese lilac drooping from their hair cast sidelong glances from beneath their sunshades which shed a golden glow over their skins and white jackets.

The boats were a brave sight, newly painted and decorated for the occasion. Some carried fresh bamboo sprays tied in bunches to the hoods; others had been transformed into dragons, birds and serpents. The Burmese are adepts at such transformation scenes; with bamboo, paste and coloured paper they can make anything, from airy pavilions in the style of palaces or pagodas, and grotesque animal masks to kites and paper lanterns. The rowers, some smartly dressed, others with merely a loin cloth, were impatient to display their skill. The leg rowers of the Inle lake are unique. As their name suggests they do not use their arms for propelling the oars, but their legs. Balancing themselves on one leg, they twist the other round the long oar, and with a powerful swinging sweep of the leg they drive the blade cleanly through the water. They are wonderfully strong and untiring, and can continue rowing like this for hour after hour, only stopping occasionally to change over from one side of the boat to the other, so

that each leg can take a turn at rowing. Their normal 'cruising' speed is steady and by no means slow, but their racing speed is very fast, and it is a lovely sight to watch a race between two well-matched crews. In 1922 when the Prince of Wales visited Burma, specially selected teams of Inle rowers, with their boats, were taken down to Mandalay, and the Prince watched them racing on the moat round Thibaw's palace. I have rarely seen a more beautiful sight. The grass lawns of the royal gardens sloped down to the moat in whose sunlit waters the rosy reflections of the palace walls were broken by drifting weeds and water lilies. The blue shadows of the Shan hills hung on the distant horizon. Down the moat shot the racing boats, the rowers poised superbly, gleaming bodies bending forward, and then straightening as the powerful legs drove the blades in perfect unison through the dappled water.

But to return to the Inle lake. The courtesy of the Yaungwhe sawbwa had placed several boats at the service of the Resident's visitors. As soon as we arrived at the lakeside, we stepped into the
 * boats, and when we were all settled the rowers edged their boats out of the throng and began to row steadily towards the open lake. We were not the only ones; by this time boat after boat was detaching itself from the swaying mass and slipping out to the lake. It was one of the customs of the festival that as many boats as possible should row out to meet the barge bearing the sacred statue and escort it back to Yaungwhe. We slipped along; beneath us the ripples sucked and slapped at the bows of the boat, ahead the silken waters of Inle stretched into the hazy distance, and around us were boats all converging towards one common aim, a minute speck across the water. Now like a travelling wave a tremor of excitement rippled through the boats. Each rower braced himself, then leaning forward sent his blade flying faster and faster through the racing waters. Over the lake came the distant lilt of a boating chant, rising and falling, alternately harsh and slow as the oars flashed and poised. Louder and nearer it came, until the approaching barge was seen no longer as a solitary speck, but as the centre of many, sweeping towards us. With a shout our rowers checked their swing, the boat slowed its surging

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drive, and in response to the steersman swung sharply round. In a moment the sacred barge swept past us, and we were speeding with it back to Yaungwhe.

The barge was a dazzling spectacle. Cunning hands had transformed an ordinary Intha boat into a huge duck, and covered with gold leaf and paint it glittered in the sun like a celestial visitant. The duck is found universally in Burmese religious art. It may be an offspring of the sacred duck of Brahminical mythology but Burmese popular tradition says that it represents Buddha's wife, who prayed that after death she might not be separated from her lord. In answer to her prayer she was changed into a duck, and in that form she is seen near every pagoda, carved in wood or stone. Wherever there is a statue of the Buddha, not far off his faithful wife patiently preens her feathers. Tradition has conventionalized her representation, and it varies but little in whatever medium she is shown. The golden duck of the sacred barge had a pouting breast, a sweeping tail with stiffened springing feathers, a small head with ear feathers sharply erect, and in her narrow open beak she held a golden ball. I never learnt the significance of that ball, but recently I came across a copy of a very old Burmese drawing of the duck, and was interested to notice that in every detail including the ball the twentieth century paper duck resembled her ancestress.

It seemed very meet and right that the sacred Buddha should be borne across the Inle lake, uplifted on the pinions of his wife, and indeed, so light and airy was that paper creation that at times she seemed like some real golden bird skimming across her natural element. In the centre of the boat a small pavilion crowned with the tiered spire of royalty had been erected, and beneath it on a gold lacquered stand was the sacred Buddha. So old it was, so covered from forgotten days, with layer upon layer of gold leaf, that it was now a shapeless lump of gold, possessing neither limbs nor features. A cloth of gold tinsel, embroidered with silver and crimson threads had been draped round it, reminding me irresistibly of the table napkin that is tucked round the neck of a child who has not yet learnt to be a 'tidy feeder'. On either side knelt

saffron robed poongyis fanning the statue with peacock feather fans. Around them were attendants bearing the yellow silk umbrellas of royalty, which poked out from under the low roof of the pavilion like enormous bedraggled tulips. In the bows of the boat a large gong hung on a carved wooden stand, and beside it crouched a figure who at regular intervals struck the gong, and sent its deep sweet notes booming over the lake. The bodies of the rowers, naked except for a loin cloth, gleamed in the sun, as they sent the golden duck scudding through the water.

We left the open stretches of clear water and approached the borders of the lake, where rushes and water lilies grew thickly. We gathered armfuls of drooping blossoms as they drifted past us, and as if enough colour were not being squandered, the heaps of red and white lilies in the boats added yet more patches of splendour to the glittering scene.

At last the barge arrived at the landing place, and a deafening clamour arose from the expectant crowd. The attendants with the umbrellas scrambled out of the boat, and stood waiting, while the poongyis lifted the lacquered stand and carried the statue on to the shore. Musicians and dancers were waiting, and as the poongyis stepped ashore the clamour rose in intensity. The orchestra struck up, gongs sounded, some deep and resonant, others clear and silvery, bamboo clappers rattled, and like David before the ark one by one the dancers began to whirl and posture. The first dancer to begin was disguised as a peacock. Over his face was a white mask, with a fierce nose, grinning lips, and white flapping ears, streaked with red. His costume was a magnificent affair of gold and scarlet, blue and green, wired so that it stuck out like stiff wings. Behind his head, outspread like a huge fan, rose a paper and bamboo tail, which he manipulated by means of strings, most cleverly conveying the impression of a peacock opening and closing his plumage. Slowly the procession formed, and with the gorgeous masked figure capering in front, gongs sounding, fans waving, umbrellas bobbing, it moved off towards the pagoda in the heart of the town where the Buddha was to be housed during his sojourn in Yaungwhe. The crowds streamed

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away from the lake, where the crushed reeds drooped, and the water-lilies trailed their dying pomp in the swaying stream.

In February 1920 we passed through Yaungwhe on the first stage of a journey down the Nam-Pilu river to Kàrenni, the home of the Karens and their bronze drums which we have already met. Karenni consists of five states, administered as part of the Southern Shan States, and in charge of a political officer whose headquarters are at Loikaw, about a hundred miles down the Nam-Pilu.

The Karens are among the most interesting peoples of Burma. Their origin is obscure, but it is probable that centuries ago they were driven out of their home in China, by the Tai or Shans, southwards to Lower Burma, whence they were pressed northwards by the Burmans, into the hills where they now live. The name Karen includes many tribes and dialects, among others the Red and White Karens the Brec, or Bre, and the Padoungs; some authorities believe that the Taungthu, whose black costume we have seen on every Shan road, are another clan of the Karen race. Each tribe speaks its own dialect and wears its own distinctive costume.

The Karens cherish a host of traditions relating to their origin, ancestors and religion. One of these traditions, namely, the belief that a white people should one day come out of the west carrying a holy book, accounts for their readiness to be converted to Christianity. The Burmans have always been most difficult to convert, and it was not surprising that the Judsons, discouraged by many failures in Burma, took heart again when they established their first missions in Karenni. The Karen girls are particularly intelligent and pliable, and many of them are trained as teachers and as children's ayahs.

Yaungwhe was dull and quiet, very different from the last time we had been there. We hired boats, and on the following day set off across the lake. For some time we skirted the shores, slipping past many Intha villages. The people who live round — and in — the Yaungwhe lake are called the Inthas, meaning 'Sons of the

Lake'. They are neither Shan nor Taungthu, and their own traditions say that they were brought up from Lower Burma in the fourteenth century by a Burmese prince; this same prince brought with him several images of the Buddha, one of which is the sacred Buddha whom we had seen carried across the lake. Their bamboo houses are built on piles rising out of the lily-strangled water. Tiny babies crawled over the floors, and peeping down through the wide cracks laughed at the green bubbles below. I do not know what the infant mortality rate from drowning is in these villages, but the mothers seemed entirely carefree, and squatted on the verandas, placidly smoking their cheroots while the babies staggered on what appeared to us literally the brink of a watery grave. We stopped for lunch at a *zayat* built on piles, and amused ourselves by dropping bits of food down into the water and watching the fish fight for them. In the evening we arrived at Pang-Kham, on the further shores of the lake. The *zayat* where we slept that night overhung the water, and the floor was perilously shaky, but our sleep was guarded by many Buddhas who smiled graciously at us through the bars of a cage in the central room.

The next day we set off down the Nam-Pilu to Loikaw. We had two boats, one for ourselves, that is my father and mother, my younger sister and myself, and one for the servants. These Intha boats are most skilfully made, from tree-trunks hollowed out, and with sides and gunwales of planks carefully dove-tailed and rendered watertight by caulking with sawdust and 'thitsi', an oil from the 'varnish tree' (*Melanorrhoea usitata*). Many of the boats are several hundred years old and have been handed down from father to son. Our boat was about twenty feet long, shaded by a curved mat covering, and most roomy and comfortable.

That river journey remains a pleasant and tranquil memory. The early rising when the mists still hung over the secret water and wreathed the posts and walls of the houses on the banks, leaving only the thatched roofs visible, drifting anchorless above the waves of mist. When we undressed at night, we had to put all

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our clothes inside our boxes, otherwise we should find them wringing wet when we woke the next morning. Out of the early mists the slow happy day unfolded like a flower. Beneath the boat's bamboo awning we sat and read and sewed and watched the banks slip by, while spots of sunlight wriggled through the holes in the bamboo, and danced across our faces and the pages of our books. In the following boat we could hear the voices of the servants and see the curl of smoke which announced the preparation of food. When lunch was ready the two boats fell alongside, and platefuls of curry and rice were handed across from the floating kitchen. At first we had suggested to the rowers that we should tie up beneath the banks, so that they too could have some food, but they had refused, saying that they preferred to eat at the end of the journey. We had four rowers in each boat, two in the bows and two in the stern, standing on small platforms, and wielding paddles about nine feet long. They were fine men, not very tall, but wiry and muscular. Two or three of them were tattooed from the waist to the knee, with monkeys, tigers, arabesques and letters of the Burmese alphabet, and the designs were so closely interwoven that from a distance the men looked as though they wore breeches. Their endurance was remarkable; they would sometimes row from six in the morning till the early afternoon, only pausing occasionally for a drink of water or to change the oar from one leg to the other. But the meal, when they did have it, was gargantuan; a veritable pyramid of rice and ngapi, sufficient to have satisfied a dozen hungry schoolboys, was not so much swallowed as posted down each throat. The meal over, out came the betel-nut, and they sat round the fire chewing and spitting till darkness fell, when they stretched themselves in their boats and went to sleep.

We on the other hand, after sitting the whole day in the boat, were anxious for exercise when we came ashore. That low-lying river valley could be unbearably hot during the day, and if we were not in the boats, we spent the afternoon inside the zayat where bamboo shutters protected our eyes from the blinding glare. Outside in the dusty compound, the 'coppersmith' bird, or red-

headed barbet, hammered out his drowsy note 'tonk, tonk-a-tonk, tonk'.

After tea, we would go out for a walk to see what there was to be seen. One day, we came to a Brec, or Bre, village, where the women wore indigo smocks and abbreviated skirts. Round the knees and reaching half way down to the ankles were rolls and rolls of bamboo rings. I presume they were regarded by the Bres as ornamental, but to Western eyes they were far from becoming, and recalled Falstaff's remark: 'Nay, and the villains march wide between the legs, as if they had gyves on . . .' They wore red and blue turbans, and round their waists were twisted vermilion and white sashes with fringed ends hanging down in front. Many of them wore bright red cloaks, and were loaded with silver ornaments. One of the women we saw must have been the wife of the local millionaire, for twisted round her turban and falling in deep loops on either side of her face and over her bosom was a heavy rope of silver plaques each a couple of inches in diameter and joined by silver links. She stood there and watched us like a duchess, with an arrogant glance and a proud carriage of the head; but when she broke her statuesque poise and walked away, all resemblance to a duchess vanished, and stalking along with the bamboo rolls on her splayed legs rubbing against each other, she looked like an animated pair of compasses.

There was no lack of variety in the scenery. Sometimes the river ran sluggishly through flat paddy land, where elephant grass grew, brown and rustling to the water's brink, and the mop-like foliage of coconut palms swayed at the summit of their lofty stems; at other times it ran in rapids over weirs, stretched across the stream and used to drive water-wheels on the banks, and through whose narrow openings the boats leapt at an alarming speed. We paddled down slow green reaches like the backwaters of the Thames, or glided between high banks, covered to the water's edge with thick undergrowth and trees in which birds fluttered and sang. We saw kingfishers and minas, heard the cooing of doves and the call of lapwings, and along one stretch of the river thousands of yellow-headed weaver birds were building

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their nests, which hung from the branches looking like half inflated toy balloons.

The river is a frequented highway and boats passed us continually, whose rowers, curious to know who we were and where we were going, hailed our boatmen across the water. We slipped past villages on the banks, collections of huts set amid pipal trees and bamboos. Boats were drawn up on the sand spits; among them village girls pounded their laundry at the water's edge, or washed their hair with a concoction made from the soap nut (*Acacia rugata*), abominably sticky to use, but which leaves the hair soft and glossy. Sometimes we passed a village on market day, and then a clamour of mingled laughter, shouts, barking of dogs, and squealing of pigs rose from the sheds, and from the boats, which, like mayflies, crowded the neighbouring stretches of river.

The most important towns between Pang-Kham and Loikaw are Saga and Pekon. We spent a day at Saga and visited the sawbwa, who told us that he could trace his descent direct through fourteen predecessors, a not too easy feat in a country whose dynasties only too often came to an abrupt and violent end. Viewed from the river, Saga is most picturesque; the houses crowd down to the water's edge, some of them, built on piles, thrusting right out into the stream. There are numerous pagodas and poongyi-kyaungs, and on their stairways leading down to the river, the poongyis gazed at us, in their curiosity neglecting to put up their priestly fans before their faces. On the opposite bank, scattered houses straggled untidily and we watched small boys urging plough buffaloes down to the water to drink and wallow. These buffaloes, with their huge spread of horn, are bad-tempered beasts, and are apt to charge white people without warning, infuriated by their very sight and scent. But they are quite docile with their diminutive herdsman, who bully, belabour and abuse them with impunity.

At Pekon the houses lie on both banks of the river, and are connected by a wooden bridge, across which streams of people pass and repass. To stand for half an hour here on market day is to see every tribe and people and tongue which inhabit this

river valley and the surrounding hills of Karenni. They come and go, carrying their baskets, and gourds, their waterpots and babies, mingling in apparent friendliness, and yet as far as the Karens are concerned, keeping their tribal integrity intact, seldom marrying outside their particular clan.

We visited a Franciscan father who lived in a village a few miles from Pekon. We went through fields of paddy, where buffaloes were ploughing the swampy soil. Upon each buffalo's back a white 'paddy-bird', a species of egret, was busily engaged in 'de-ticking' its steed. In every rice field in Burma, these graceful birds are seen, their white plumage gleaming as they perch on the buffaloes, or stalk behind the plough, darting their long necks hither and thither to catch the grubs.

We came to the village, where for twenty years the father had lived alone, and found him preparing to go off the next day on a tour of his 'parish', a small affair of several hundred square miles. He was a charming Italian with a tanned face, and a bushy beard out of which broke a wide and humorous smile. He gave us sharp red wine to drink, and showed us his vegetable garden in which he persuaded all kinds of plants to grow in an alien soil. We were also shown an Italian-Padaung dictionary which he had spent many years in compiling, but which he told us he could not afford to get printed; I have often wondered since whether his work at fixing the fast-dying language of the Padaungs has been lost to science.

The village where he lived was inhabited by these Padaungs, a tribe whose 'giraffe' women have since been rendered famous in England by the agency of Bertram Mills. The Padaung woman's costume must be one of the most uncomfortable that has ever been devised. Soon after a Padaung girl has been born a brass ring is fastened round her throat, and year by year more rings are added till the neck is stretched to a grotesque length. We saw some women whose necks were a foot long. Similar rings are round her knees, her calves and ankles. And as if this weight were not sufficient three or four silver bracelets are clasped round each wrist, silver chains tinkle against her brassy neck, heavy earrings are

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spiked through her ears, and silver plaques and pins adorn her black hair. The father told us that missionaries of all societies have been trying for many years to wean them from this practice, and converts are forbidden to burden the throats of their baby daughters. I believe I am right in saying that the women converts of the Catholic missions are allowed to retain their neck rings, but the Baptists insist that they should discard them. When the last ring is taken off, the unsupported neck flops in grotesque helplessness until the muscles have gained a modicum of strength.

One day we were gliding through a green tunnel where drooping trees sent down their reflections deep into the heart of the water. Ahead the green curtain was twitched aside to show a gleam of white, and as we came nearer we saw on one bank a dozen ruined and deserted pagodas. The grass grew high between them and crackled in the hot sun, creepers wreathed the plinths, shrubs and saplings grew out of the crumbling brickwork, and behind the white bell of one of the spires a cotton tree broke into salmon-pink showers. The copper htis had long since fallen from the pinnacles, and their sweet-tongued bells lay rusting among the undergrowth. A Burman will seldom repair or rebuild a ruined pagoda, and the country is covered with ruined shrines. The rain ploughs gutters in them, and white ants drive endless galleries through them until the once lovely tapering thing is a heap of mud, over which the jungle throws a decent shroud of oblivion.

We slid alongside the bank, and scrambling out, went exploring among the pagodas, while the boys and rowers watched us with indifferent eyes, for a ruined pagoda cannot be desecrated. We soon found that others had been before us and had tunnelled under the pagoda in search of buried treasure. In one of the underground vaults we found rolls of manuscript, tough brown paper made from grass and bamboo and covered with close circular Burmese or Pali script. My father was anxious to take them away, and find someone to translate them, but as we lifted them they fell in dusty fragments, riddled through and through with white ant. So we had to leave them. What beauty or wisdom may have been lost to the world in their decay? Were they the

records of the building of the pagodas? Names of donors and benefactors? Lists of acolytes to the neighbouring monastery? Or did some Shan Aquinas, meditating hour after hour in the timeless peace of the poongyi-kyaung, inscribe for the benefit of his disciples these commentaries upon the Law of Buddha?

We did not come back empty-handed to the boats, but carried cradled in our arms an alabaster statue of the Buddha. We found it gazing tranquilly from a ruined alcove, gleaming white and gold, untouched by time, and inviolate amid the surrounding decay. Agnes christened it Eva, and there was something feminine about the pale alabaster face, the heavy-lidded eyes, the smile of patient wisdom. The statue represents the Buddha in meditation, sitting cross-legged, with one listless palm upturned, the fingers of the other hand touching the ground. The elongated ear lobes are a conventional indication of the weight of jewels which Gautama wore before he adopted holy poverty, the circular marks on the head represent the snails which crawled over the Blessed One's head to protect him from the heat of the sun, when he was meditating in some treeless plain.

Loikaw, the headquarters of Karenni, was destined in 1942 to be the scene of some of the bloodiest fighting of the Burma campaign. The Chinese, trying to stem the Japanese advance into the Shan States, fought with the ferocity of tigers. The dead filled the streets of Loikaw, and there was blood in the waters of the Nam-Pilu. When we arrived, it was a scene of deep peace; the Nam-Pilu itself seemed to be asleep, so gently did her ripples lapse beneath our boats. In the afternoon sunlight the little town was bathed in a warm, dusty drowsiness; it seemed utterly separated from anything noisier than the occasional snarl of a pidog, and the vain repetition of the coppersmith bird.

The political officer was away touring his district when we arrived, but he had placed his house at our disposal, so during our stay in Loikaw we did not camp in a zayat, but lived in luxury in a house whose pictures, rugs and piano bore witness to our host's nice taste and musical ability. Nevertheless, mosquitoes and snakes are my outstanding memories of the place. Mosquitoes

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usually wait till sundown before they launch their main attack, but in Loikaw we were bitten throughout the day, by a peculiarly ferocious brand which displayed a fiendish cunning in attacking one in vulnerable and inaccessible regions. We had been warned beforehand to beware of snakes; our host had told us that he had narrowly escaped treading on a karait one night on his own staircase. A karait is the most deadly of the Indian snakes, 'one foot nothing of instant death'. Opposite my bedroom window rose a small black pagoda on a white plinth and, more often than not, when I glanced out of the window I caught the sheen of a gliding form, slipping in and out among the carvings on the plinth. Apart from the snakes it harboured, I liked that little pagoda; the tinkle of the bells round the gilt hti hung so sweetly, with such wistfulness, on the passing breeze. Beside the pagoda stood three tagundaings. Tagundaings are found near every pagoda or poongyi-kyaung. They are tall 'prayer-posts' usually carved or lacquered red and gold, surmounted by a hti or by the ubiquitous carved duck. Hanging from the post are white paper or cotton streamers, not unlike a thin and elongated aerodrome 'sock', and with tassels flying from the end. Our ayah used to tell us that people in hell could catch hold of these tassels and pull themselves out of their place of torment, but Ma Hlon's theology was not infallible. The Buddhist conception of hell has little resemblance to the Christian doctrine. To a Burman, hell is not the final place of punishment, but merely the lowest rung in the ladder of existence. Neither pious deeds nor loving intercession on the part of others can shorten by a day the particular period in any cycle which an individual has earned for himself; but the instinct of intercession cannot be suppressed, and perhaps those white streamers which flap from countless tagundaings do satisfy some inarticulate desire to assist those tormented ones upon whom the hand of the Lord is heavy.

A Baptist missionary lived at Loikaw. Her husband had died several years before, but the old lady refused to return to America, and continued to live in Loikaw, to preach the Word, baptize converts and cultivate lac, the profits on which were handed over

to mission funds. Her house stood in the centre of a plantation of sticklac trees, which stretched in every direction as far as we could see. She had begun the enterprise, nursed it and directed it, and when we visited her it was a fully established and flourishing concern. Lac, or shellac, is obtained from the secretions of hundreds of insects who live upon the resin of the sticklac tree. To obtain the secretions, the insect must be killed, and so strict Buddhists will have nothing to do with an industry which involves taking life.

The plantation was bounded on one side by a small ravine, beyond which rose a huge outcrop of granite rock, twice as large as a cathedral, and looking, with its castellated outlines not unlike some grim Norman ruin, half buried among trees. On three of its squat pinnacles a trio of pagodas rose like white tongues of flame, their brightness the more startling for their background of gloomy rock and matted creepers. Wooden stairways like a ship's gangway, sloped from one level of the rock to the one above by which pilgrims could carry their offerings to the shrines. I doubt, however, whether many pilgrims made that pious journey, for the missionary told us that two tigers lived on the rock; she saw them frequently, sunning themselves on the ledges, and at night they came down to the plain in search of food and water. At supper that evening we had pumpkin pie and corn bread, made from maize flour grown on the estate. When it was time to go she gave us various messages for the Baptists in Taunggyi, cheerfully waved good-bye, then turned indoors as casually as though she lived in her American home-town, and as though snakes, tigers and solitude were illusions. An indomitable lady of eighty, carrying on the traditions of all devoted missionaries. No tiger leapt upon us in the darkness as we went home; at the time we were thankful, but in later years, from the safety of an arm-chair, one can only think regretfully of good 'copy' lost.

Ten days later we disembarked at Yaungwhe in the shadow of a large pipal tree. Our rowers were paid, our luggage unloaded, and then packed into two bullock-carts which were to carry it and the servants up to Taunggyi. A car was waiting for us; after

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several abortive attempts the engine spluttered into life and at the first roar the bullocks plunged and snorted in panic.

Looking back now I perceive something symbolic in that scene. The boats and the bullock-carts, types of the ancient world, and beside them a motor car; speed against leisure, restlessness alongside tranquillity, and the inexorable impact of the one upon the other. It is not altogether fanciful, that, in retrospect I see in the advent of the motor car, the symbol of those influences which were to destroy first the integrity of the Shan States, and then their peace.

Heretofore the people had remained almost untouched by the West. Since they had first settled among these hills and valleys, the centuries had slipped by unnoticed. They were indolent and unhygienic, but they were content with the essentials of living, and prince and peasant alike shared the divine faculty of perceiving and creating beauty. One could have wished that Time's moving finger might have been stayed to let us look a while longer on a little world without electricity, telephones, wireless, cars — aeroplanes — tanks. But it was not to be so. The changes wrought by science, industrialism and war, were ultimately to touch the life of the remotest dweller among those far hills. The march of 'progress' had begun before we left Taunggyi, and its pace accelerated with every passing year. In England I fell out of touch with affairs in Burma, and though aware that changes were taking place I did not realize the extent of the revolution. And, then I read *Lords of the Sunset* in which the author Mr. Maurice Collis, writes of his visit to the Shan States in — I think — 1937, and was astonished to learn how complete was the process of Westernization. Gone were the haws which I knew, whose every winged line told of their ancient ancestry; their place has been taken by concrete mansions. The young sawbwas who rule in them have been educated in English universities, their wives speak fluent English, interspersed with slang. Little Khun Ohn of the jewelled necklace whom I met twenty-five years ago, went from the chiefs' school to study law at Cambridge; he married an English girl who is now his mahadevi at Mong-Mit. The

country was 'opened up' — an unpleasantly eviscerative phrase. When we left Burma, a few months after our visit to Loikaw, the motor car was just ceasing to be a novelty in Taunggyi. Very soon there were motors and motorable roads throughout the Shan States. The quiet country through which we travelled became accustomed to the clatter of lorries and the scream of klaxons; in an afternoon a political officer could cover as much ground as we did in a week. The twisting mule paths, the rutted cart tracks gradually vanished. More and more motor roads were driven through the hills; more cars came, hooting, hurling themselves along those roads, raping the shy glades and the defenceless places. Beauty vanishes — beauty passes. Progress — commercial exploitation — and then . . . Total War.

I knew that land in earlier days when the roads lay in tranquillity and the sky kept its ancient peace. I hoped never to revisit it, so that it would always remain lovely for me. It was enough that I could return in my dreams, and know that I was in no strange land, but that I had come home. So what sharp pain it was to watch the shadow of war creeping ever closer towards Burma, until its hideous eclipse had darkened the bright circle of a child's memories.

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